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“MESSENGER SERIES,” No. 3.

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# THE ACTS

OF THE

# EARLY MARTYRS

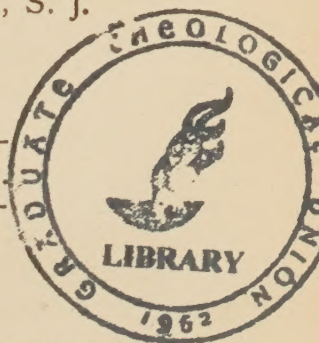
BY

J. A. M. FASTRÉ, S. J.

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FIRST SERIES.

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## P R E F A C E .

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**B**Y STUDYING the Lives and the Acts of the Martyrs, the sincere Christian can most easily learn to appreciate the living and life-giving influence, which the Sacred Heart of Jesus exercises on His Church. What else, save His continued abiding in her, could have bestowed upon her children that heroic fortitude amidst the dangers, the hardships, the tortures of persecution which the combined malice of the world and of hell has never ceased to stir up against them? He, who said, "You shall be witnesses unto Me. . . even to the uttermost part of the earth," (Acts i, 8,) had before said, "When they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what to speak." (Matt. x, 19.) Hence

the faithful followers of the Man of Sorrows were filled with consolation, and abounded with joy amidst all their tribulations. And why? because the more they were hated by the world, the more they became conformed to the image of the Son of God: the more closely were they united to the true source of all comfort, the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Herein, then, lay the principle of the super-human strength and courage of the Martyrs. And, whether we view them looming up before us, grand and majestic forms, in the distant ages of early Christianity, or study them amidst the trials of modern times, the same Spirit animates their generous souls, and makes them spurn alike the transitory joys of earth, and the cruel persecutions of its rulers, for the sake of Him who loved them first. In every age the Church has had her Martyrs, and so it shall, doubtless, continue to be; that at no time she may cease to exhibit the vitality infused into her by her divine Founder, and that her children, inspired by the noble example of their Brethren, may ever

be ready, if God so wills it, to bear witness, in like manner, to the Faith that is in them.

Although, in compiling these Acts, the "Acta Martyrum" of Dom. Ruinart have chiefly been followed, much has also been drawn from various other sources. They were first published in the "Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, *A Monthly Bulletin of the Apostleship of Prayer*," a periodical which every Catholic family should endeavor to patronize, if the interests of the Heart of Jesus, the well-being of the members of one's household are, as they should be, an object of anxious solicitude to parents or to guardians.

May the reading of these pages continue to be, as it has already been in the past, a source of edification, and an incentive to spiritual fervor and Christian heroism.

ST. XAVIER COLLEGE, Cincinnati, Ohio.







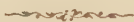
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# THE MARTYRS.



## I.

ST. IGNATIUS.

**I**F the true spirit of early Christianity were to be looked for, where should we sooner expect to find its working, than in the chief and representative of the great City, which gloried in having been the first to give the name of Christians to the followers of the God-man? With Ignatius, therefore, we begin these acts of the Martyrs.

Ignatius, surnamed Theophorus, had been trained in the school of virtue and Christian knowledge at Ephesus. The words of the Apostle, who had reclined on the Saviour's bosom at the last Supper, had inspired him with so great a zeal for the salvation of mankind, and so longing a desire of laying

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down his life for the testimony of the truths which he was commissioned to preach, that his whole career seems to have been a kind of continued martyrdom. Raised to the episcopal dignity by the apostles themselves, he governed the Church of Antioch during the fearful storms of persecution excited by the Emperor Domitian. Fasting and prayer were the weapons he employed to avert the dangers which threatened his flock; the light of his teaching served as a guiding star to those who were exposed to suffer the loss of their faith; the example of his own unfaltering courage awakened the confidence of the most faint-hearted. The Pagans themselves, struck with wonder at the sight of the self-sacrificing charity of the Bishop, confessed the supernatural power of a religion that could make heroes of men, who, by their modest demeanor, appeared to dread even the gaze of their fellow-beings. Great was the number of them who, with their blood, sealed the profession of their faith. But the storm had passed away. Ignatius devoted himself to the instruction of those intrusted to his pastoral care. He put them on their guard against the insidious wiles of heresy and schism; he taught them the advantage and necessity of harmony of minds and wills; in short, he impressed on all the faithful the practical importance of the maxim,

which he had heard so frequently repeated by his beloved master: "My little children, love ye one another."

And thus for forty years did this holy man, amidst the alternations of storm and sunshine, continue the father and guardian of his children; while but one regret seemed occasionally to cast a gloom over his happiness. Many of his children had gained the crown of martyrdom; himself had not been deemed worthy of so blissful an honor. "Alas!" he uttered with a sigh, "it is a sign that I have not yet attained to that perfect charity, which characterizes the true disciple of Jesus crucified." The moment, however, arrived at last, when Heaven decreed that this glory should be no longer withheld from this good and faithful servant.

Trajan had waged a successful war against the Dacians, the Scythians, and the neighboring nations. Flushed with victory, and glorying in his power, he fancied that one wreath was wanting in his crown, so long as the God of the Christians remained unsubdued. Wherefore, he resolved to compel all the followers of Christ, either to sacrifice to his own idols, or to pay with their lives their fidelity to religion. In the execution of this design, he aimed chiefly at the Bishops and other prominent men, because, he imagined, it would not be difficult to

destroy the army, when deprived of its leaders—to scatter the flock, when the shepherd was either slain or beguiled in his snares.

Having set out from Rome, Trajan arrived at Antioch, the metropolis of Syria. Here he continued for some time to make the necessary preparations for the war, which he was about to undertake against the Parthians. Ignatius, who knew that the Emperor enjoyed the reputation of being naturally of a humane disposition, was unwilling to abandon his flock. He had reason to hope, that the sacrifice of his own life would be sufficient to appease the wrath of the prince, and that, by offering himself as a victim, the lives of his people might be spared.

Trajan gave orders to summon the holy Bishop before him. Ignatius appeared. On seeing him, the Emperor exclaimed :

“Who art thou, evil spirit, who darest disobey our commands ; nay, who even persuadest others to do the same, and thus to perish miserably ?”

“No one did ever call Theophorus an evil spirit,” answered Ignatius ; “but, if you give me that name because I am hateful to evil spirits and dreaded by them, I glory in the name. For Christ, the King of Heaven, has given me power to destroy their snares.”

“And who is Theophorus?” said Trajan.

“He that bears Christ in his breast,” said the holy Bishop.

“Thinkest thou, that we do not also bear in our breasts the gods, who enable us to defeat our enemies?”

“You err when you call the demons of the Gentiles gods. There is only one God, who created the heavens, the earth, and the sea, and whatsoever is contained therein. And there is only one Christ Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God; and oh! how I long to be received into His kingdom.”

“Speakest thou of him who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?” asked the Emperor.

“I speak of the same, who, by His death, crucified sin and its author, and who places beneath the feet of them that bear Him in their breasts all the deceit and wickedness of demons.”

“And dost thou bear the crucified within thee?”

“Yes; for it is written: *‘I will dwell in them and walk in their midst.’*”

Trajan, sorely annoyed by the fearless replies of the holy old man, pronounced this sentence: “*We order, that Ignatius, who says that he bears within him the Crucified, be bound in chains and led by soldiers to great Rome, there to become the prey of wild beasts for the amusement of the people.*”

When the Martyr heard this sentence, he was unable to contain his joy, and exclaimed : “ I thank thee, O Lord ! because thou didst deign to honor me with a perfect love for Thee, since Thou sufferest me to be bound with chains, even as Paul, Thy apostle.” Afterwards, he cheerfully put on his chains, and, with many tears, commended his beloved flock to the keeping of the Heavenly Shepherd, and delivered himself to the soldiers, who had been ordered to take him to Rome.

The intention of Trajan in sending the condemned Bishops far away from their own cities was, doubtless, to wear out their powers of endurance by the hardships of long and wearisome journies ; that thus he might extinguish the fervor of their charity, and triumph at last over their unwavering constancy. But Providence frustrated his plans. The journey of Ignatius from the East to the West was like that of the sun, who sheds everywhere floods of light, as he advances in his course ; for thus it was that the martyr made the light of his doctrine shine upon all, whilst he filled their hearts with courage and cheerfulness. Nay more, the evening of his career was destined to be the beginning of a more resplendent glory than aught of earth could ever have secured to him.

Inflamed with a burning desire for suffering, he



set out with a joyful eagerness for Seleucia, where he embarked with two of his disciples, Philo, a deacon of Cilicia, and Agathopodus: the same, probably, that have recorded the acts of his martyrdom. After a long and tedious voyage, they landed at Smyrna, a celebrated city of Ionia. Here Ignatius went to visit Polycarp, his friend and former companion, who, like himself, was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist. We can better imagine than describe the joyous meeting of two such personages. How great a consolation must it have been for the one to present himself to the other, as a captive in chains for the sake of Christ; how affectionately must Polycarp have kissed those chains, the brightest ornaments that could embellish the limbs of the true follower of the Man of Sorrows!

“If thou lovest me in every deed,” said Ignatius to his friend, “beg of the great Master of us all, that He may deign to accomplish in me the great work He has so gloriously begun. Do not ask Him to deprive me of this glorious livery of His servants.”

“Nay, brother,” said Polycarp, “although I envy thee so great a blessing, I will not entreat for thy freedom. And do thou in return pray for me, that I too may, hereafter, be found worthy to suffer for His sake.”

In this manner did these holy men give comfort to one another.

No sooner did the Churches of Asia hear, that the Martyr had come to Smyrna, than they hastened, by their deputies, to testify to him their love and veneration. The Ephesians sent to him their Bishop Onesimus, a man of wonderful charity ; the Magnesians sent Damas, their Bishop, a man of God ; the Trallians deputed Polybius, their Bishop, who, in his own name and in that of his flock, congratulated Ignatius on the happiness of being in chains for the sake of Christ. Nor were these the only persons gathered together for the same purpose : they were accompanied by many of the most distinguished members of their respective Churches, priests and deacons, as well as laymen. They all united in admiring the constancy, the fervor and piety of the illustrious prisoner ; they listened with eagerness to his instructions ; they wept and rejoiced together ; they partook together of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, that sweetest bond of union and heavenly charity.

Although Ignatius longed to consummate the sacrifice of himself, he was not insensible to these marks of genuine affection. He hastened, therefore, to express his appreciation of the tenderness and solicitude which they had manifested towards



him. To the Ephesians he writes: "It is for Jesus Christ I wear these chains; may your prayers obtain that they be to me the pledge of a glorious resurrection. I know who I am and to whom I write: I am a condemned captive, and you are full of kindness; I am in danger, and you are established in grace. I would gladly give my life for you and for those whom ye have sent to me. Remember me. Pray for the Church of Syria, whence they are taking me a prisoner, in chains, to Rome, although I am the least of that Church. I salute you in God the Father and in Jesus Christ our common hope."

To the Trallians: "I know that the purity of your sentiments and the union of your hearts, amidst all the hardships which you suffer, are not merely transient virtues, but are, as it were, natural in you; for this I learn from your Bishop Polybius, who has come to congratulate me in the chains which I wear for Christ Jesus. . . . I know many things in God, but I judge myself according to my weakness, lest I perish through vainglory. I have more reason to be in dread now than heretofore, and I ought not to hearken to those that speak well of me. They who praise me, instead of bringing comfort to my heart, grieve me. In truth, I long for sufferings, but yet, I know not whether I am

worthy of them. Although I am in chains, and understand heavenly things, the ranks of the Angels and Principalities, things visible and invisible, am I therefore a true disciple?" . . . .

In a similar manner he wrote to the Magnesians, exhorting them to union and charity, and cautioning them against the influence of heresy and schism. But his most remarkable letter is the one which he sent to the Romans. Many of the Christians of Asia were desirous of accompanying the holy Martyr, but, unable to obtain so great a favor, they took a shorter route, so as to reach Rome long before the arrival of Ignatius. He, however, availed himself of this opportunity, and wrote by them the following epistle :

"To the beloved and enlightened Church, which presides in the country of the Romans. . . . I prayed to God that I might behold you face to face—you, so worthy of God—and I obtained more than I asked; since, in chains as I am for Christ Jesus, I hope to embrace you, if it be God's will that I deserve to reach the goal. For the beginning is fairly arranged, if I do but receive the grace of attaining my destiny without hindrance. I fear lest your charity may prove hurtful to me. It is easy for you to do what you please, but it will be difficult for me to attain unto God, if you spare me. If you

*— and —*

do not speak of me, I shall be united to God; but if you love my body, I shall again have to run my course. You cannot give me a better proof of your affections than by allowing me to immolate myself to God, while the altar is prepared. United, therefore, in charity, sing ye a hymn to the Father in Christ Jesus, because He deemed the Bishop of Syria worthy of coming from the East to the West, that thence he might, as it were, go down to rise again unto Him. You have never envied any one; you have taught others; I desire that you may firmly adhere to your teachings. Ask of God both inward and outward strength for me, that I may add example to my words; that I may not only be called a Christian, but be so in very deed. . . .

“I am writing to the Churches, and I mention to them all, that I willingly and gladly die for God, provided you put no obstacle to my desires. I beseech you, therefore, not to manifest any ill-timed kindness for me. Suffer me to become the food of wild beasts, that I may thereby attain unto God. I am God's wheat, and I must be ground by the teeth of lions, that I may be the pure bread of Christ. Do you rather invite the wild beasts to become my sepulchre, and to leave nothing of my body, that, when I am fallen asleep, I may be to none a cause of trouble. Then shall I be truly a disciple of

Christ, when the world does not even behold my body. Ask our Lord for me, that by this means I may become a sacrifice to Him. I do not, as Peter and Paul, give you a command: they were Apostles—I am a condemned person; they were free—I am still a bondsman; but if I suffer, I shall become the freedman of Christ, and I shall arise a freeman in Him. Now that I am in chains, I learn to covet naught that is worldly or transitory.

“ During my journey from Syria to Rome, by sea and by land, both night and day, I am fighting with wild beasts, chained as I am to ten leopards; that is, to a band of soldiers, who become the more wicked, the more kindness is shown to them. Although I gather instruction from their unjust behavior, *yet I am not hereby justified*. Oh! how I long for the wild beasts, which are kept prepared for me! I hope to find them in readiness for me; I shall even caress them to devour me quickly, lest they might treat me as they did some others, whom they were afraid to touch. If they be unwilling, I shall compel them by force. Pardon me; I know what is expedient for me. Now I begin to be a disciple. Naught of all that is visible and invisible affects me, provided I attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire and the cross, the throngs of wild beasts, the tearing, the shattering, the dislocating, the cutting

of limbs, the bruising of the whole body, the frightful tortures of the devil—let them all come upon me, if I may but enjoy Jesus Christ. The pleasures of this life—the kingdoms of this world, are of no use to me. To die for Christ is better for me than to rule, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth. *“For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?”*

Him do I seek, who died for us; for Him do I long, who rose again for us. This, my gain, is near at hand. Pardon me, my brethren; hinder me not from attaining unto life. Desire me now to die, since I desire to belong to God. Do not rejoice with the world; suffer me to possess the pure light. When there, I shall be a man of God. Grant me to be an imitator of the Passion of my God. If any one bears Him in his heart, he may understand what I mean; and knowing how I am straitened, he will have pity on me.

“The prince of this world is anxious to carry me off, and to pervert my longing for God. Let none, therefore, of you who are present, take part with him: do ye rather support my course, which is God's. Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips, whilst at the same time you have the world in your hearts. Let envy have no dwelling within you. Were I even to entreat you to act differently when



I shall be present, believe me not; but do ye rather believe that which I write to you now, for I write to you full of life, yet eager to die. My love is fastened to the Cross. There is not within me a fire, which loves matter, but a living water that whispers to my heart—“*Come to the Father!*” I find no delight in the food of corruption, nor in the pleasures of this life. I long for the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the Body of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who in these later times was born of the seed of David and Abraham; I long for the drink of God, His Blood, which is incorruptible charity and ever-enduring life. I desire to live no longer according to men. This I shall obtain, if ye are willing; will it, therefore, that ye also may be pleasing to God. In a few words I ask you again, do believe me. Jesus Christ will make it known to you that I speak the truth; that mouth is doubly truthful by which the Father Himself hath spoken the truth. Beg ye for me, that I may obtain. I have not written these things to you according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit of God. If I suffer, it will be a sign that ye were willing. If I am rejected, ye have hated me.

“Remember in your prayers the Church of Syria, which now has God for its Shepherd in my stead.

Jesus Christ alone will govern the same, as its Bishop, as well as your charity. For myself, I am ashamed to be called one of their number, for I am unworthy; since I am the least of them, and one born out of time. But I have obtained mercy to be something, if I attain unto God. My spirit salutes you, and so does also the charity of the Churches that have received me in the name of Jesus Christ, not as one merely passing by; for they, who were naught to me, according to the flesh, have conducted me from city to city.

“These things I write to you from Smyrna, by some Ephesians worthy of all praise. Crocus, a name very dear to me, is also with me, together with several others. As to those who have preceded me from Syria to Rome, for the glory of God, I believe that they are known to you; please inform them that I am near. Since they are all worthy of God and of you, it is proper that ye entertain them in all things. Written the 9th of the Kalends of September, that is, the 24th of August. Farewell unto the end in the patience of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

While the Saint remained at Smyrna, he wrote several other letters to the different Churches of Asia Minor. All these writings breathe the same spirit of meekness, lowliness, patience and charity,

and contain the most precious instructions in regard to the faith and discipline of the early Christians. Taught by the Apostles themselves, he was the legitimate interpreter of their doctrines, and a faithful channel of the Apostolic traditions. We need not wonder, then, at the anxiety which he manifests concerning the whole Church; for the workers of evil had, even at that period, begun to disturb its harmony, especially in Asia.

From Smyrna he was taken to Troas. Here the Lord granted him the sweet consolation of learning that peace had been restored to the Church of Antioch. He hastened to communicate the happy tidings to his friend Polycarp. Far from attributing this gratifying result to his own merits and unceasing prayers, he thanks God, because He has deigned to hearken to the united supplications of all the Churches. Henceforth the greatest burthen of uneasiness is lifted from his shoulders; now he has only to struggle against the fear, that the affection of the Christians at Rome may hinder him from consummating his martyrdom.

He was not permitted to tarry long at Troas, but was hurried on to Neapolis, a city on the confines of Thrace. Hence he was to continue his journey by land, through Macedonia. From Neapolis he proceeded to Philippi, a leading city of that country.



Here the Martyr drew fresh strength and courage from the remembrance of the sufferings which St. Paul had undergone at that place. For the Apostle, because he had cast out a divining spirit from a female slave, who thereby brought much gain to her master, was, together with Silas, his companion, scourged, and then thrown into prison. But the doors of the prison were miraculously opened, and the bands of all were loosed. Paul, however, after he had baptized the keeper of the prison and all his household, refused to leave his place of confinement, until he had been honorably discharged by the magistrates themselves. (Acts xvi.) This he did for the honor of the Gospel, and to impress upon the minds of the officers of the law the injustice of the act which they had committed, by condemning and punishing him without a previous trial.

When Ignatius recalled all these circumstances, and compared his own situation with that of the great Apostle, doubtless his mind was filled with new thoughts of his own unworthiness. He kissed the chains which he wore for the sake of Christ, and resolved to show himself a servant worthy of so good a Master. His journey through the rough, mountainous country which he now traversed; the cruel and spiteful behavior of the ten soldiers who

guarded him night and day and caused him every annoyance; his advanced age and weakness of body—all these combined to make his journey truly a sorrowful way. Yet, amidst all these hardships, his greatest suffering arose from his Christian companions, who, unwilling to be separated from him, followed him everywhere in his travels. His charity was much more concerned about them than about himself. The joys of the spirit, the near approach of his final struggle, were to him a source of unspeakable comfort; but the affection of these faithful friends, who loved him with so generous a devotedness, was an ever-bleeding wound in his heart.

At last, however, they arrived at Epidamnus, now called Durazzo, a town on the Adriatic. Here they embarked, and, descending the Gulf, passed through the Straits of Sicily, and entered the Tuscan Sea. When they came within sight of Puteoli, the Saint would gladly have landed there, that thus he might follow in the footsteps of St. Paul, who, when bound in chains for the faith, even as himself, had gone thence by land to Rome. But contrary winds did not permit them to effect a landing. Wherefore, continuing their voyage, after one day and a night of favorable weather, they reached Porto, at the mouth of the Tiber.

The public games, during which Ignatius was to be exposed to the wild beasts, were fast drawing to a close. The soldiers were anxious not to disappoint the people. The Martyr himself became the more eager, the nearer his struggle was at hand. His companions were in the utmost distress; they gazed upon the countenance of the just. A beam of radiant joy overspread its every feature. They wept in silence—they knew that their approaching separation was to him the beginning of endless bliss.

The news of their arrival soon reached Rome. The Christians came in crowds to meet him. Grief and joy were in every breast; they rejoiced to meet and embrace the servant of God, the reputation of whose sanctity had gone before him; they grieved at the thought of losing him so soon—and forever. Some of the most influential hoped to appease the clamors of the people, and to persuade them not to demand his death during the present games; after that, they thought it would not be difficult, at least not impossible, to obtain a pardon from the Emperor. The Spirit of God revealed to Ignatius their compassionate designs. Forthwith he begins to entreat them, with many tears, not to envy his happiness. He reminds them of what he had said in the letter addressed to them. He appeals to their charity,

which they can now exercise by allowing him to win the crown of Martyrs. Then they all kneel down together; he beseeches the Son of God to look down in mercy upon His Church, to put an end to persecution, and to preserve true charity among all Christians.

It was now the twentieth of December. During several days, Rome had been revelling amidst the wild freedom and unrestrained merriment of the *Saturnalia*. This, the last day, was devoted to the *Sigillaria*, or festival of the images. The whole city was in commotion. A more exciting drama, not unusual in the days of persecution, was to be performed for the amusement of the people. Persons of every rank, age, and condition were thronging into the amphitheatre. The Roman senators took their places in the range of seats assigned to them. The matrons and sacred Virgins did not disdain to witness—yea, to encourage by their presence the bloody spectacle. Loud clamors arise from the vast multitude thirsting for the blood of the innocent victim. The roar of the lions in their den re-echoes the savage howl of the mob. Ignatius, undismayed, hears the harsh, grating chorus.

“I am the wheat of the Lord—I must be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may become the

pure bread of Christ," he says, and advances into the arena.

"The Christian to the lions!" shouts the impatient multitude.

The Martyr lifts up his eyes to Heaven. "Father," he says, "I thank Thee, for that the long wished-for hour is come at last. Bid me come to Thee."

For a moment the silence of death reigns among the spectators. All eyes are fixed upon the champion of Christ. The strong grates which secure the wild beasts in their den are thrown open.

Two hungry lions come bounding into the arena. They rush upon their victim—they tear him to pieces—devour the body, leaving only the larger bones.

Ignatius had found repose in the bosom of God.

The Martyr received his crown on the 20th of December, in the year of our Lord 107, under the consulship of Sura and Senecius. The Acts of his Martyrdom were written by eye-witnesses of his glorious struggle. They say:

"After witnessing this inhuman spectacle, we returned to our dwelling, and there falling on our knees, we besought the Lord, with many tears, to make known to us the result of the combat. Afterwards, having fallen into a light slumber, some of us beheld Ignatius standing near, and

embracing us; others saw him in prayer and blessing us. Some others, again, observed him covered with perspiration, as after a severe labor, presenting himself before the Lord. When, on awaking, we related these visions to one another, we thanked God, the Giver of all good things; we celebrated the praises of the Saint, and we resolved to make known to you the time of his Martyrdom, that, assembling together on that day, we may hold communion with the generous athlete who conquered the devil and finished his course, as he had desired, in Christ Jesus our Lord; through whom, and with whom, be glory and power to the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen."

The Church celebrates the festival of the Saint on the first of February—the Greeks celebrate it on the twentieth of December, the day of his Martyrdom. His relics were first taken to Antioch, whence they were, A.D. 637, translated to Rome, where they now rest in the Church of St. Clement, Pope and Martyr.





## II.

### ST. POLYCARP.

**S**T. POLYCARP, like the blessed Martyr Ignatius, was a disciple of St. John the Apostle. At a very early age he embraced the Christian religion, and, during a life of unusual length, he was ever its zealous defender. Before his banishment to the Island of Patmos, St. John confided to his care the episcopal see of Smyrna, one of the most important of Asia. How well Polycarp acquitted himself of this charge may be gathered from the testimony of our Lord Himself, who thus speaks of him: "To the angel of the Church of Smyrna write: 'These things saith the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive. I know thy tribulation and thy poverty, but thou art rich, and art slandered by those who say that they are Jews, and they are not, but they are a synagogue of Satan. Fear none of these things which

thou shalt suffer. Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried: and ye will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.'"—Apoc. ii, 8, 9, 10.

The familiar terms on which this holy prelate had lived with several of the Apostles, and of the Disciples, who had seen our Lord when He dwelt among men, gave a wonderful authority to his words and writings. The purity of the sacred doctrine which fell from his lips, was never called in question. The example, above all, of his innocent life was the best proof of the truthfulness of his teachings. His numerous disciples looked upon him with deepest reverence, and endeavored to realize in their own conduct the practical lessons of the illustrious model thus placed before them. This we see more especially in the great Irenæus, the most distinguished of all the disciples of Polycarp. A certain Florinus had fallen into several heresies; Irenæus thought it sufficient to quote against him the opinion of his Master—the purest source of apostolical traditions—in order to condemn him. He says:—

“When I was a boy, I saw thee in Lower Asia with Polycarp; thou wast then living in splendor at the court of the Emperor, yet thou didst use thy

best endeavors to gain his esteem. I remember more distinctly the things which then occurred, than those which have happened more recently. For what we learn in our childhood grows with our mind, and becomes in some manner blended therewith; so that I could tell the very place where blessed Polycarp was seated whilst discoursing, his gait, his manner of life, his outward appearance, the words he addressed to the people; how he was wont to speak of the familiar intercourse he had held with John, as also with those who had seen the Lord; and how he remembered their conversations, and whatsoever else he had heard from them concerning the Lord, His miracles and His doctrine. All this Polycarp related exactly as we find it in the Scriptures, since he learned it from those who themselves had gazed upon the Word of life. To all these things, by the mercy of God, I listened at that time with the greatest attention, and I wrote them down, not on paper but in my heart; and, by God's grace, I do diligently repeat and revolve them in my own mind. Now, I can affirm before God, that, if that blessed and apostolic pontiff had heard aught of the kind, he would have stopped his ears, and exclaimed, as was his custom: 'Good God! unto what time hast Thou reserved me, that I should endure these things!' And he would have



fled from the place wherein, whilst standing or seated, he had heard such discourses."

This abhorrence of heresy the holy man had inherited from his Master St. John, of whom it is said that, one day, having entered the public baths at Ephesus, he was informed that the heresiarch Cerinthus was within the place. On hearing this, the Apostle fled immediately, and exclaimed: "Let us flee, lest the bath fall in whilst Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is within."

Meanwhile the religion of the Saviour continued to be assailed by the powers of darkness. The passions and prejudices of Paganism attacked it from without; the secret machinations of heretics attempted to undermine it from within. These latter, under the leadership of Marcion, were now pursuing a far different plan from that which the teachers of error had hitherto followed. They assumed the mask of piety, they professed to practice the greatest austerities; they forbade the use of wine and of animal food; they obliged their dupes to offer themselves, of their own accord, to suffer Martyrdom. Yet the proud Marcion himself had been cut off from the communion of the Church, on account of a scandalous sin, for which he refused to perform the prescribed penance. His hypocrisy, therefore, could not deceive the wakefulness of the

guardians of the Faith. As, however, his antecedents were too well known in his own country, he went to Rome. But here also his duplicity did not long remain concealed.

A decree issued by Antoninus Pius forbade the persecution of the Christians on account of their religious belief. The Church, consequently, enjoyed a short interval of peace. Polycarp thought that Providence had now prepared for him the way to realize a desire which he had long entertained; he resolved to visit the Supreme Pontiff, that with him he might confer on several subjects regarding the interests of religion. He set out for Rome, and arrived there under the pontificate of St. Anicetus. It was a precious time for the metropolis of the Empire, and of the Faith. The most illustrious Bishop of the East had come to consult the successor of the Prince of the Apostles. It was, doubtless, a source of the greatest comfort to the Faithful to be enabled, not only to behold a personage who had conversed with the Disciples of the Lord, but to ask his opinion concerning the teachings of such men as Valentinus and Marcion. The Saint, although he detested heresy, was moved with pity at the sight of the poor and simple individuals who had been misled by the sowers of cockle. He applied himself, with his accustomed zeal, to the

Christian duty of bringing them back to the true fold. Thousands of them, moved by his authority, and still more by the holiness of his life and conversation, returned again to the bosom of Catholic unity.

During his stay at Rome, he met one day the heretic Marcion, who, going up to him, said: "Polycarp, dost thou not know me?" "Yes," replied the holy Bishop, "I know thee, the first born of Satan." Such is the name which he was wont to give to the obstinate broachers of heresy.

Shortly after his return to Smyrna, the Church became again the object of a new persecution. Marcus Aurelius had succeeded Antoninus Pius. The new Emperor was a pagan philosopher, that is to say, like the rest of this class of men, he professed a great regard for his own opinion, and despised that of all others. Unlike his predecessor in the Empire, he detested the Christians, whose wisdom and virtue, whose contempt of earthly things, whose fortitude in the midst of suffering, put to the blush his own boasted stoicism. Hence it may truly be said, that his philosophy, instead of improving the heart and mind of this Emperor, served rather to destroy in him the naturally good disposition of his character. Whether from real, or merely pretended, superstition, he was scrupulously

devoted to the practices of idolatry ; and how could a religion, which condemned as abominable those very practices, find favor in his eyes ? Add to this, the incessant appeals of the priests of the idols, to root out the very name of Christianity. The blood of Martyrs was again made to flow in Rome ; and soon the persecution was extended to the provinces of Asia.

When St. Ignatius, on his way to Rome, stopped at Smyrna, Polycarp kissed the chains of the Martyr, and begged him to ask our Lord, that he too might have one day the happiness of being a captive for Christ. This pious wish was now to have its fulfilment, and Polycarp was to bear witness to the truth, by sealing with his blood the doctrines which he had preached. The circumstances of his glorious Martyrdom cannot be better described than by quoting in the main the account, which the church of Smyrna sent to the various Churches in Christendom.

“The Church of God at Smyrna, to the Church of God at Philomelium, and to all the holy Catholic Churches everywhere : may the mercy, the peace, and the love of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ abound with you all.

“We write to you, brethren, an account of the death of some Martyrs, especially of the holy

Polycarp, who by the seal of faith has put a stop to the persecution of the enemy. For whatsoever has taken place, has happened according to that which the Lord himself has foretold in His Gospel, wherein He shows us what we ought to expect. He suffered Himself to be delivered up and to be fastened to the cross, that we might be made free. He willed, therefore, that we should be His imitators. He the Just, endowed with heavenly power, was the first to obey the commands of the wicked. As a kind master, He gave himself as a model to his servants; and, lest they who follow His footsteps, might think Him a harsh teacher, He underwent whatever hardship He recommended others to endure; that we all, being formed and taught by him, might not only secure our own salvation, but also the salvation of our brethren.

The sufferings of this life, borne for Christ's sake, merit for us a heavenly kingdom. It is indeed deserving of a great reward, to trample under foot the things of earth; to despise riches and honors; to forsake one's parents, and those dear to us; but that which crowns all is Martyrdom. For, what greater homage can servants render to so good a Master, especially when they consider that He has suffered much more for them, than they can possibly endure for Him? Wherefore, it is our



duty, since we have been edified and instructed by their example, to narrate with reverential fear the facts as they occurred, and to place before you the triumphs of those devoted soldiers of Christ, that you may understand how great was their love of God, how great their fortitude in the midst of the fiercest torments. And who is not filled with admiration, when he sees that they appeared to find a certain sweetness in the blows of the scourges, in the tortures of the rack? when the sword that smote them seemed lovely? when the flames that burned them were cool and refreshing? The crowds of people, that witnessed the inhuman spectacle, were struck with amazement, nor could they check the unbidden tears of commiseration, when they saw those lacerated limbs, those streams of blood, and the very bowels of the heroic sufferers exposed to view. Yet no groan was uttered by the Martyrs; no cry of agony could the violence of the pain draw from them; for, as they willingly accepted these tortures, so they bore them courageously when inflicted. The Lord, who from on high beheld the struggles of His servants, cheered them on with the hope of soon possessing that crown, for which they were combating. They called to mind that everlasting fire, which they escaped by enduring the present. They longed to be freed from the chains of their



earthly tabernacle, that they might enter the bright and joyous dwelling of their heavenly Father. They preferred truth to falsehood, heaven to earth, eternity to time.

Meanwhile the devil was not slow in the use of every artful device, that might enable him to overcome the generous resolves of the Martyrs. But the grace of God attended them in their trials, and warded off the poisonous shafts of the infernal enemy. Hence it happened that the struggle of the noble athlete Germanicus, instead of adding to the fears of those who began to waver in their fidelity, did, on the contrary, animate them to a holy emulation of his constancy. This valiant confessor, together with several others, had been brought to Smyrna. At the sight of the youth, the Proconsul was moved with pity, and said to him:—

“Germanicus, how canst thou disregard the riches, the honors, the enjoyments of life, so dear to the hearts of men?”

“I despise them all,” replied the Martyr.

“Thou art still so young: many years of happiness are in store for thee. Obey the orders of the Emperor; have pity on thyself, and on thy youth; sacrifice to the gods.”

“Never!”

“Consult thy own interests, or I will have thee thrown to the beasts.”

“Better far is it for me,” answered Germanicus, “to lose my life in this world, than to surrender my hopes of the hereafter.”

Thus speaking, he advanced boldly towards the lion let loose against him. Forthwith the ferocious beast devours the heroic youth. The multitude stands amazed at the courage of the Martyr; but astonishment soon yields to hatred and revenge, a universal shout arises from the assemblage: ‘Away with the guilty wretches; let Polycarp be sought.’”

This outcry of the people produced the greatest excitement throughout the city. Quadratus, the Proconsul, gave orders to have the holy Bishop arrested. Polycarp was resolved not to abandon his flock, although he knew that the blow of persecution was chiefly aimed at himself. The faithful, however, by their entreaties, prevailed upon him so far as to induce him, almost in spite of himself, to withdraw,—at least until the violence of the storm should pass away,—to a country-seat not far from Smyrna.

In the meantime a Christian, Quintus by name, who had but just arrived from Phrygia, his native country, heard what had taken place. Moved by an imprudent desire of confessing the faith, and



relying on his own strength, he presented himself, of his own accord, before the Proconsul. But his weakness was greater than his resolution. For no sooner did he see the wild beasts that were to be let loose against him, than he began to tremble with fear. He repented that he had shown so much forwardness, and finished by cowardly approving that which he had come to destroy. The Proconsul found it not difficult to persuade him to sacrifice to the idols. This shameful conduct teaches us, not rashly to commend the indiscreet zeal of those who willingly expose themselves to so great a trial, and, full of self-reliance, go in search of the danger which it is glorious enough to brave, with God's grace, when brought upon us by the persecutors.

Wherefore the blessed Polycarp, a man of consummate prudence and highest wisdom, hearing that the enemies of Christ were in search of him, betook himself to a place of concealment; not indeed because he feared death, but because he deemed it proper to delay its hour by a becoming modesty. Even when thus withdrawn from the presence of his people, he did not neglect his fatherly care of them. Night and day, by fervent prayer, he commended them to God, and besought the Giver of all comfort to grant peace to His Church. Moreover, he implored the special help

of the God of the strong, that he might himself be enabled to fight manfully the good fight, wherein he was soon to engage for His glory. For he knew, by a vision, that the hour of the struggle was at hand. Three days before he was seized, he saw in a dream, whilst reposing, the pillow under his head surrounded with fire. When he awoke out of his sleep, the holy man said to them that were near: "My brethren, God hath given me a sign; I shall be burned alive."

Meanwhile, they who were in search for him had been successful in finding his hiding-place. But his friends, by the most affectionate entreaties, once more persuaded him to go away to another part of the country. Thither the pursuers followed him. No sooner had the Saint reached the house wherein he had to stay, than the soldiers also arrived in the neighborhood. For a long time they sought him in vain. At last they seized two little boys, and beat one of them so cruelly, that they forced him, overcome by the pain, to point out the house where the holy Bishop was hidden. It was late in the evening, on a Friday, when they came to the place. They found Polycarp resting in an upper room, whence he could easily have made his escape to another house, but he said: "I fled as long as I was ordered so to do; as long as God willed it, I

foiled the efforts of my enemies ; now too, O Lord, Thy will be done." Hereupon he came down from his room, and presenting himself to his captors, he addressed them in the kindest manner.

The soldiers were filled with wonder, when they beheld the venerable old man whom they had been sent to capture ; some felt indignant at the zeal displayed in pursuing a person whose every feature bespoke the candor and innocence of his life. The aged prelate saw their astonishment, and said to them with a cheerful smile : " I doubt not, my friends, but you feel somewhat disappointed ; for, as you yourselves perceive, the game was hardly worth the trouble. Nevertheless, you have done your duty, and may God's will be done. I have, however, one request to make, which I hope you will not refuse."

Pleased with his words and appearance, they readily consented to grant whatever it was in their power to allow.

Then he said to them : " I know that you are wayworn and hungry ; grant me then a short time to offer my prayers to God, whilst you rest and refresh yourselves." At this they were pleased still more, and gladly accepted his proposal.

Immediately the Saint ordered a plentiful repast to be spread before them, thus literally fulfilling



what we are commanded in the Scriptures: "If thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink." After this, Polycarp, standing up and raising his eyes toward heaven, begged of God to bestow upon himself His holy grace, that he might in all things fulfil His good pleasure even unto the end of life. He besought Him to be mindful of His holy Catholic Church throughout the whole world. He recommended to His mercy and favor all persons, great and small, the rich and the poor, friends and enemies. His prayer lasted for nearly two hours; and with so great a fervor did he pray, that the soldiers, who heard him, were filled with admiration, and most of them were sorry that so pious and venerable an old man should be put to death.

When his prayer was concluded, and the time had come for them to go, they placed him upon a beast of burden, and returned to Smyrna. It was now the great Sabbath day, which precedes the Pasch. Not far from the city they came up with a vehicle, in which were Nicetes and Herod, his son, the Irenarch, or imperial Justice of the Peace. Although the Irenarch was before anxious to have Polycarp arrested, yet now, when he saw him a prisoner, he was moved with pity, and invited him to take a seat with them. They doubted not but that, with words of kindness and fine promises,

they should be able to overcome the constancy of the venerable old man, whom neither threats nor ill-treatment had been able to subdue. Wherefore, considering his religious principles as merely a matter of opinion, they used the most artful persuasions to win him over so far as to feign, at least, to offer sacrifice.

“Tell us,” they said, “O Polycarp, what harm is there in saying Lord Cæsar, and in offering sacrifice, that thou mayest save thy life?”

“I shall never do what you advise me,” answered the Saint. For he knew that to the word “Lord,” as used in this connection, they gave a meaning which belongs only to the Supreme Being. It was not simply a title of respect, which subjects, Christians as well as Pagans, were wont to give to their rulers.

The Irenarch, however, insisted, urging him to comply with his request. The blessed Martyr listened for some moments in silence, until he could endure their impious proposals no longer. Then, summoning up all his strength, he said:—

“No; nothing shall ever induce me to change my sentiments; neither fire nor the sword, neither prison nor exile; no tortures shall make me consent to offer incense to a mortal man, much less to demons.”

Thereupon, growing very angry, and uttering the most dreadful language, they thrust the Saint out of the carriage, although they were driving very fast at the time. His leg was severely bruised by the fall; yet, as if nothing had happened, he continued cheerfully on his way. As soon as they entered Smyrna, the guards conducted him to the amphitheatre. The people of Smyrna were assembled in the stadium. They had witnessed the combat of the gladiators—men fighting one another unto death; they had been amused by the struggles of the *bestiarii*, or beast-fighters—some of whom were hired, and supplied with arms, to exhibit their skill against the wild beasts let loose into the arena; others, criminals condemned to death, were exposed unarmed and bound, to become the prey of the maddened tigers and lions. The arena was crimsoned with the blood of human sufferers, sacrificed to the pitiless barbarity of the unfeeling thousands. The groans of the dying were unheard, the bleeding wounds of the defeated combatants were unheeded. Loud and savage yells arose ever and anon from all parts of the vast assemblage, still thirsting for more victims to sate their ferocious appetite. It was into the presence of this savage multitude that the Martyr was led by his captors. When they saw him, the rage of hell seemed to

burst from their bosoms, with so terrific a shout did they cry out, "Polycarp to the lions!"

The meek and lowly servant of God stood before them, modest and timid in appearance, his frame bowed down by the weight of years; but with a heart unconscious of fear. For, as he entered the arena, the cheering accents of a superhuman voice—heard also by the brethren, who were present,—came floating over the din and confusion of the vociferous crowd: "Be strong, O Polycarp, and contend manfully."

He was now led to the tribunal, where the Proconsul was seated. Quadratus, seeing him, was no less struck than the Irenarch had been, with the dignified and venerable looks of the Saint, and felt anxious to spare his life. Wherefore he said to him:

"Art thou Polycarp, the great chief of the Christians?"

"I am Polycarp," answered the Saint.

"Have a regard for thy old age," added the Proconsul; "do not imagine that thou shalt be able to endure torments, the very sight of which made the strongest youths tremble with fear."

"I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me," replied the Martyr.

"Why shouldst thou refuse," asked Quadratus,

“to swear by the genius of Cæsar? Follow my advice before it is too late: renounce thy superstitions. It is honorable to repent of one’s error, when the Emperor and the gods demand it.”

“I am a Christian,” said Polycarp.

“Say,” continued the Proconsul, “with all this people: Away with those that deny the gods.”

Hereupon Polycarp, looking around, and fixing his eyes for some moments upon the throng of people that filled the benches of the amphitheatre, and then raising them toward heaven, said with a sigh: “Away with the godless.”

The Proconsul, concealing his disappointment, said:—

“Swear by the genius of Cæsar, and I will set thee free. Blaspheme Christ.”

Polycarp replied:

“It is now eighty-six years since I began to serve Him. He hath never done me any harm, but on the contrary much good. How should I revile Him, whom I love and revere, my King and Saviour, who punishes the wicked and rewards the good?”

Quadratus insisted, and said again:

“Swear at least by the genius of Cæsar.”

The holy Confessor answered:—

“Why do you press me to swear by the genius

of Cæsar? Do you pretend not to know who I am? If so, understand me well: I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what is the teaching of Christianity, name the day; I will be ready to instruct you, as soon as you will be ready to listen to me."

"Address thyself to the people," said the Proconsul; "give an account of thy belief to them."

"I deem it most proper," replied Polycarp, "to give my reasons to yourself, provided you do not oblige me to do anything unjust. We are taught, to give to the powers appointed by God the honor which is due to them. But the people I do not consider the proper persons to whom I should give an account. I stand here before you—not before the people—as my judge."

The Proconsul was so sorely annoyed, when he heard these answers—so full of a holy freedom blended with a fearless dignity of manner—that he appeared at a loss how to act. After a few moments, however, he began to use threats.

"I have wild beasts at hand," he said; "I will have thee thrown to them to be torn to pieces, unless thou changest thy mind."

"Let them loose against me," said Polycarp, "and whatsoever else your cruelty may invent; I will glory in my sufferings, I will rejoice in my

wounds ; my merits will be increased by the greatness of my torments ; for these will be the measure of the rewards I shall receive. My mind is prepared for the worst ; the rage of lions causes me no dread."

"If thou thinkest so lightly of the wild beasts," rejoined Quadratus, "I will have thee consumed by fire, unless thou changest thy mind."

"Do you threaten me with fire, which burns for a few moments and is then extinguished? Alas! you know nothing of the judgment to come, and of the everlasting fire, which shall torment the wicked hereafter. But why delay by my words the execution of your design? Do with me as you please : bring forward whatsoever torments you wish."

Whilst the Martyr uttered these last words, a halo of heavenly light overspread his countenance, filling his heart with confidence and joy. The Proconsul was struck with astonishment at the sight ; he could not understand how an aged man could display so great a vigor and so unyielding a firmness. Nevertheless, he ordered a herald to advance into the middle of the arena, and to cry aloud three times, "Polycarp perseveres in calling himself a Christian." No sooner had the herald proclaimed these words, than the whole multitude,

Gentiles and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, began to clamor for the death of the Saint.

"He is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the enemy of our gods, the destroyer of their temples: it is he who taught multitudes not to sacrifice, not to worship. He has, at last, found what he sought; let him die."

Then they called upon Philip the Asiarch, or officer who superintended the public games, to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But that officer replied, that the games of wild beasts in the amphitheatre were ended for that day. Hereupon they all shouted: "Let him be burned alive."

The Saint hearing this, turned to some of his brethren, who had followed him, and said: "You see now, brethren, the truth of that vision whereof I spoke to you."

Meanwhile the crowd ran to the shops and the public baths, and soon gathered a large quantity of straw and dry wood to raise a funeral pile. The Jews, especially, distinguished themselves, as was their custom on such occasions, and showed more eagerness than all the rest. The pyre was now ready for the victim, and the Martyr loosed his girdle, laid aside his garments, and attempted to take off his shoes—which last he had never been in the habit of doing himself, for the faithful felt

so great a veneration for him, that they always vied with one another in rendering him this service. The executioners were about to chain him to the stake, but he said:—

“Suffer me to remain as I am. He that gives me the will to suffer for Him, will also give me strength to endure the violence of the flames.”

Wherefore, they merely tied his hands behind him. Then he mounted the funeral pyre—a victim chosen from the great flock of the Lord, to be a burnt-offering to Him for an odor of sweetness. Afterwards, raising his eyes towards heaven, he offered this prayer:—

“God of the Angels, God of the Archangels, O Thou, who destroyest sin and restorest us to life; O Thou, the supreme Ruler of the universe, Who guardest the race of all the righteous, who live in Thy sight: I, Thy servant, bless Thee, Who deemest me worthy of this suffering, that I may have a share in the crown of Martyrdom and in its chalice, through Jesus Christ in the oneness of the Holy Spirit. Grant that, when the sacrifice of this day is complete, I may receive the promises of Thy truth. Therefore, I bless and glorify Thee in all things, through Jesus Christ, the Almighty and Everlasting High-priest, through Whom, and

with Whom, and with the Holy Spirit, be glory to Thee, now and forever. Amen."

So soon as he finishes this prayer, the fire is kindled. The flames shoot up toward heaven in circling eddies. But behold! God wishes to honor before men the holiness of His servant. Suddenly the flames are parted, and, like the sails of a ship swelling with the wind, arise around the Martyr, forming an arch above his head. Within this marvellous enclosure is seen the blessed Polycarp: his body does not resemble burning flesh, but glows like silver or gold, when purified in the furnace. A sweet odor, as it were of incense and aromatic spices, perfumes the air all around. The Pagans themselves are filled with wonder; they confess that the body of a Christian is spared by the fury of the flames. Nevertheless, after waiting for some time, and seeing that the body remains unconsumed, they order the executioner to draw near, and to pierce it with his sword. This is done: forthwith so great a quantity of blood gushes forth, that the fire is extinguished. The body is seen still standing erect and lifelike, but the immortal spirit has winged its flight to heaven, there to receive the crown of glory from Him who had enabled the generous champion of the Cross to triumph over the powers of darkness.

Such was the Martyrdom of the admirable Polycarp, the Catholic and Apostolic Bishop of Smyrna. He suffered on the 7th of the Kalends of May, A. D. 166, under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, Statius Quadratus being Proconsul of Asia.

The Christians immediately endeavored to secure the precious remains of their beloved Bishop. But Nicetas, the father of Herod the Irenarch, at the instigation of the Jews, prevailed on the Proconsul to refuse them this consolation. The ostensible ground on which he based this interference was his fear lest the Christians might abandon the worship of the Crucified to adore the Martyr. "Senseless man," say the writers of the Acts of his Martyrdom, "who knew not that we could never abandon the worship of Jesus Christ—who died for the salvation of the whole world—to adore any other. For we adore Jesus, because He is the Son of God; but the Martyrs we honor and revere on account of their true and fearless love for their divine Master—they being His genuine disciples and imitators." The centurion, therefore, who was sent by the Proconsul to settle the difficulty between the Christians and the Jews, ordered the body to be burned, according to the custom of the Greeks and Romans. Some of the bones, however, were

rescued from destruction by the pious zeal of the Faithful and deposited—as richest treasures, far more precious than gold or jewels—in the Church of Smyrna. There they assembled, especially on the day of his immortal birth, to celebrate the sacred mysteries, and to thank God, for that He had glorified His blessed servant, and strengthened the faith of the children of the Church by the noble example of their teacher and father, St. Polycarp.





### III.

#### ST. JUSTIN.

**J**T. JUSTIN was born, at the beginning of the second Century, in Palestine, in the ancient town of Sichem, which at that time was a Roman colony, and, under the name of Neapolis, possessed the rights of Roman citizenship. His parents were of Greek origin, and followed the religion and practices of the land of their forefathers. In his early youth he began to devote himself to the study of philosophy, which meant in those days to seek after wisdom—that is, after general truths within the scope of human reason—in order to learn to know God and to attain to the knowledge of the supreme good. As we learn from Justin himself, his first master was a Stoic philosopher. After attending his school for some time, Justin concluded that it would be impossible ever to acquire, under the guidance of this perso-

nage, the knowledge which was the object of his pursuit; because his master himself was not only ignorant of the Supreme Creator of all things, but appeared to make little account of this kind of study. Wherefore, he attached himself to a Peripatetic. This individual soon disgusted the generous sentiments of the young philosopher, by giving him to understand, in unmistakable terms, that the sordid love of gain was his sole object in communicating knowledge to others—a disposition which Justin deemed wholly unworthy of one who was, by profession, a sage. He next betook himself to a disciple of Pythagoras, who stood very high in the estimation of all his admirers, but still more so in his own. Here the youthful philosopher was required to apply himself to the study of astronomy, music, and geometry, as a preparation to dispose the mind to the contemplation of the supremely good and beautiful. This roundabout way was by no means satisfactory to the anxious mind of Justin; he soon grew tired, and began to look out for some method more congenial to his desires. He had not to seek long. A follower of the Platonic school had recently established himself at Neapolis. Justin placed himself among his disciples. He took the greatest delight in the teachings of this new master, and felt satisfied that he made rapid

progress in the science, to which he had so earnestly devoted himself. It seemed to him, that the understanding of incorporeal things lifted him up from the things of earth, and that the contemplation of the Platonic ideas, gave wings to his mind. He rejoiced at having become wise in so short a time, and, in his vanity, fancied that he was now on the point of beholding the Deity Himself—for this he understood to be the object of Plato's system of philosophy.

Thus, full of himself, and vainly puffed up with the knowledge he had acquired, he was wont to withdraw into the most lonely places, that, undisturbed and left to himself, he might give his mind wholly to the attractions of sublime meditations. One day, he directed his steps toward the seashore. As he drew nigh to a charming spot, where he thought himself beyond the reach of intrusion, he was surprised, on turning himself, that he was followed by an old man of mild and venerable aspect. Justin, in his astonishment, stood still, and gazed in silence at the mysterious stranger.

“Do you, perhaps, know me?” said the old man to the wondering youth.

“I know you not,” replied Justin.

“Why thus stare at me with such a look of surprise?”

“I wonder that you should follow me into a solitary place like this, where I hoped to find the solitude I am seeking.”

“Several of my friends are on a journey; their long absence fills me with anxiety; I wander everywhere in hopes of hearing some tidings from them. But yourself,” continued the stranger, “you appear to be ill at ease. The mind that seeks for rest in solitude must needs have some hidden cause to shun the society of men.”

Hereupon, captivated by the engaging manners of the stranger, Justin said:—

“I come hither to give myself to philosophical meditation; for I consider that, among the various pursuits of the sons of earth, none is nobler, none more worthy of man than the love of wisdom, the search after truth.”

“Doubtless,” said the old man, “this is an aspiration worthy of man; but even herein he is frequently misled, both by himself and by others; for to attain to the knowledge of true wisdom, we need an experienced guide to keep us from mistaking falsehood for truth, our own vanity for wisdom.”

“But,” replied Justin, “I am not without guides. I have Pythagoras, Aristotle, the god-like Plato. Who shall say that these are no safe teachers?”

“Those great men do certainly represent, in a sublime degree, the noblest efforts of the human mind, kept within the limits of mere natural reason; but all their teachings cannot satisfy the cravings of the heart. You shall find, after you have mastered all they taught, that a great void is left within your soul, that they have indeed opened for you a boundless abyss, the immensity whereof they were wholly unable to fill.”

“If this be so,” said Justin, “do tell me, then, where I may find the masters who can satisfy the longings of the mind and the heart; for, if the great men of whom I spoke have not known the truth, I am willing to seek it wheresoever it may be found.”

“In days long since gone by,” answered the venerable stranger, “ere yet the name of those whom you call philosophers was known to men, there were personages distinguished for their virtues, upright, holy, and beloved of God. These, inspired by the divine Spirit, foretold the things which at present are taking place in the world. They are called Prophets. They alone knew the truth; they alone proclaimed it to men without fear or favor, without pride or vanity. They announced what they heard and saw by the Holy Spirit that spoke in them. Their writings are still extant. When read in the

spirit of faith, they unfold before the mind new but everlasting principles, an object, an aim, worthy of the true philosopher. They do not employ demonstration to inculcate the truth of their doctrine; the testimony which they give to the truth is far above every demonstration. Their oracles, which are either already accomplished or which are now daily seeing their fulfilment before our eyes, exact from us, almost in spite of ourselves, the fullest belief. Add to this, that they wrought real miracles, whilst they made known to men the name of the one only God, the Creator and Father of all things, and His Son, Jesus Christ—teachings and wonders which false and pretended prophets, under the inspiration of an unclean and deceitful spirit, never can equal. These do indeed attempt prodigies to mislead the simple and unwary, but the work of demons turns at last to their own confusion. As for you, pray that the veil of error may be withdrawn from your eyes, that you may behold the light; for none can see and understand these things, unless God and His Christ enlighten the intellect."

These and similar words did the venerable stranger address to Justin. Above all, he insisted on prayer and meditation as a means of coming to the knowledge of the truth. The young philosopher promised a faithful compliance with all the recom-

mendations of his aged friend ; after which he departed, and he never saw him again.

This conversation had filled the heart of Justin with a boundless desire of studying the books of the Prophets, and of the other sacred writers, the friends of God. He felt persuaded, that in them alone he could find the true philosophy of life.

But there was another motive which powerfully attracted him to Christianity, and soon induced him to embrace its doctrines—this was the constancy of the Martyrs. To him the fearlessness shown by the Confessors of the Faith at the sight of death, even in the midst of torments ; their contempt of what is most abhorrent to human nature, appeared an irresistible proof of the truthfulness of the religion which they professed, and of the falsity of the accusations which were brought forward against them by the malice of their enemies.

So soon as Justin had become initiated in the sacred doctrines and mysteries of the Faith, he began to devote his time to the study of the Holy Scriptures. At first these readings filled him with awe ; he felt the majesty of God overwhelming him at every page ; but yet a sweet repose seemed to steal over his senses, as he found himself con-



stantly in the presence of the great Teacher, who spoke to his heart and illumined his understanding. He was not satisfied with a merely speculative knowledge of religion; he endeavored practically to realize in his mode of life the lessons of true wisdom, gathered from the Sacred Writings. He gave himself up to all the exercises of Christian piety and devotion. Like many of the most distinguished among the early Christians, he led the life of an ascetic—selling all he possessed, and distributing the price among the poor—leading a life of celibacy, a stranger to the customary pursuits of the world.

However, to show that, by becoming a follower of Christ, he had not forsaken the life of a philosopher, but had rather begun to apply himself to the study and practice of a philosophy more holy and more sublime—even the wisdom of God—he continued to wear the philosopher's cloak. This garment, which among the Pagans, denoted those who devoted themselves to the study of moral and intellectual science, was worn, among the Christians, by those who made profession of a more austere manner of life. But it was not so much the outward appearance of our Saint as his inward ardor and zeal to spread the truths of the Gospel, that made him conspicuous among the men of his time.

Knowing that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required," he was the ever-ready and fearless champion of the truth. All his actions were animated by the spirit of the Gospel; he seemed to breathe naught, save the glory of Him who had so graciously enlightened him from above; he longed to establish the kingdom of Christ in the hearts of all his fellow-men. With this object in view, he travelled through many countries of the East, sowing everywhere the good seed of the Word, and diffusing, by the example of his holy and innocent life, the "sweet odor of Christ unto God."

To secure a more extensive field for the exercise of his burning charity, he resolved to establish himself at Rome. Here he opened a school, which, in a short time, became a nursery of Religion. All were welcome here: he received without distinction the Jew and the Gentile. Unlike the greater number of the philosophers of Paganism—who held truth captive and durst not proclaim it aloud, lest they might expose themselves to some danger—without fear of men, Justin withheld naught of the truth. Nor was he satisfied with teaching by word of mouth; his writings were no less effective in bringing vast multitudes to the knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity. His *Apology*, addressed

to the Emperor, the Senate, and the Roman people—whilst establishing in the most solid manner the truths of Religion, and refuting the calumnies heaped upon the Christians—induced Antoninus to put a stop to persecution.

It was during this time of freedom from outward annoyance that Justin made a journey to Asia. Whilst at Ephesus, the Saint was one day accosted by a stranger, accompanied by six others.

“By the garments you wear,” said the stranger to him, “I see that you are a philosopher. If it be not displeasing, I fain would confer with you on the object of our mutual pursuit.”

“I am willing to gratify your praiseworthy desire,” replied Justin; “but who does me the honor of making this request?”

“My name is Tryphon; I am by nation a Hebrew. The last civil war drove me from the land of my birth. I retired into Greece, and took up my abode in Corinth. There I began to give myself to the study of philosophy; hence I love the conversation of those who, like myself, are seekers after truth.”

“It is rather a cause of wonder to me,” said Justin, “that you, belonging to the Jewish people, as you do, should devote yourself to the reading and study of heathen sages, instead of applying your-



self to the books of Moses and the Prophets. For, although the former have spoken of God, and have known His oneness, and have even written dissertations on His Providence, yet they have generally written and spoken, as if there were, in reality, many gods; they have limited His Providence to universal things, to genus, to species, and denied it with regard to individuals or particular persons. And why? To enjoy a full freedom of saying and doing whatsoever came into their heads, as if they had naught to hope or to fear from the divine Justice."

Then he related how he, desirous of attaining to the knowledge of the one true God, had disciplined his mind in various schools of philosophy, until, as it were by chance, having met a real sage, he was persuaded to go to the very fountain-head of all true Wisdom, Jesus Christ, foretold in past ages by men inspired of God. "These men," he added, "have made me a true philosopher; for this is the only sure and saving philosophy." And, as he wished that all might enjoy the same peace and happiness, he said to Tryphon:—

"If, then, you have any care of your salvation, and trust in God, it will not be difficult for you, who are far better acquainted with this doctrine, than I was at that time, to attain to true wisdom and

happiness, through Christ, the long-promised, and long-expected Messiah."

After this they entered on a discussion which lasted two whole days. Justin divides his arguments into three parts. In the first, he shows that the law of Moses was abolished by the substitution of the New Law; in the second, he proves the Divinity of Christ; in the third, he demonstrates the call of the Gentiles and the establishment of the Church.

The reasoning of the Saint was unanswerable. Tryphon and his companions were forced to own their defeat; and it might have been reasonably expected, that the result of this conference would have been their conversion to the Faith. But, although man may plant the seed of the Word in the hearts of his fellow-men, and water the same with the dew of fervent prayer, still it belongs to God alone to give the increase. Tryphon and his friends left Justin, filled with admiration for his zeal and wisdom, but human considerations overruled their better knowledge, and held them enslaved to their errors.

On his return to Rome, Justin found, that the persecution against the Christians had been renewed by Marcus Aurelius, the successor to Antoninus Pius. At that time, there lived in Rome a Cynic



philosopher, Crescens by name. This individual had won for himself great notoriety by his hatred of Christianity, but still more by the infamy of his vices. He was a friend of the Emperor, who had a strange weakness for philosophers of this sort. Justin challenged him to a public disputation, during which he convicted him, either of an entire and wilful ignorance of the teachings of the Christians, or of being one of the most wicked of men. This discussion was several times renewed with the same results.

The Saint now addressed a second Apology to the Emperor. In this discourse he shows, that he was fully aware of having, by his fearless struggles in the cause of truth, incurred the enmity of the Sophists, and that he was soon to feel the effects of their vengeance. Nor was the blow, which he had foreseen, long delayed. He was denounced and arrested, together with several Christians, who were his disciples or fellow-laborers.

Rusticus, at that time Prefect of Rome, summoned them before his tribunal. He commanded them to yield to the orders of the Emperor, and to sacrifice to the gods. Addressing his words to Justin, he said :

“Come now, be obedient to the gods, and comply with the orders of the Emperor.”

"Whoever obeys the precepts of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, shall never be blamed or condemned," answered Justin.

"What profession dost thou follow?" asked Rusticus; "to what art or science dost thou apply thyself?"

"Hitherto," said the Saint, "I have busied myself with almost every sort of learning; of late, however, I have exclusively devoted myself to the teachings of the Christians, a doctrine which is by no means to the liking of them that suffer themselves to be deceived by the error of false opinions."

"What! dost thou, miserable wretch, find delight in a doctrine like that?"

"Undoubtedly I do," replied Justin, "because that doctrine enables me to walk with the Christians in the ways of truth and justice."

"What sort of a doctrine is that of the Christians?"

"The doctrine, which we profess, consists in believing that there is one only God, the Creator of all things visible and invisible; that Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the Son of God, foretold by the Prophets; that He is the Herald of Salvation, who teaches those that are his true disciples; and that at the end of time, He shall come to judge the whole human race. For myself, who am but a weak and

ignorant mortal, I can in nowise speak of that infinite Deity in a manner worthy of Him. This is an office assigned to the Prophets, who, inspired from above, foretold many ages ago the coming upon earth of the Son of God."

Rusticus then asked him, in what place the Christians were wont to assemble. "They meet," answered Justin, "wherever they choose or can. Do you imagine, that with us it is the custom for all to assemble in the same place? It is not so. The God of the Christians is not restrained within limits: He is boundless as well as unseen; He fills the heavens and the earth: everywhere the faithful adore Him, everywhere they celebrate His glory."

"But," insisted the Prefect, "I order thee to tell me, where the assemblies are held, and where thou thyself hast thy school."

"As regards myself," answered the Saint, "hitherto I have dwelled near the Timotinian baths, close to the residence of a certain Martinus. This is the second time that I am come to Rome, yet I am unacquainted with any other places. Whosoever any person has chosen to call upon me at my dwelling, I have freely instructed him in the doctrine of the truth."

"Thou art, then, a Christian?" said Rusticus.

"Most assuredly," replied Justin, "I am a Chris-

tian." After this the Prefect, turning himself to the companions of the Martyr, first said to Chariton :

"Art thou also a Christian?"

"Yes, by the grace of God, I am a Christian."

Then he asked of a woman, named Charitana, whether she too followed the Faith of Christ. She answered that, by God's blessing, she was a Christian. Next, addressing Evelpistus, he said :

"And thou, who art thou?"

"I am a slave of Cæsar, but, as a Christian made free by Christ Himself, I am, through His grace and blessing, made a partaker of the same hopes, that animate them whom you see here before you."

Afterward Hierax was asked whether he also was a Christian. He replied :

"Most undoubtedly: because I serve and adore the same God."

"But," inquired Rusticus, "is it Justin, who has made you all Christians?"

"For myself," replied Hierax, "I have always been, and will continue to be a Christian."

On this Pæon, arising, said: "I also am a Christian."

"And who has taught thee to be a Christian?" asked the Prefect.

“My parents instructed me in this holy law.”

Then Evelpistus said :

“I have ever hearkened with the greatest delight to the discourses of Justin, yet it was from my parents that I learned the Christian Religion.”

On being asked by the Prefect, where his parents resided, he answered :

“In Cappadocia.”

“And where in the world,” said Rusticus to Hierax, “are thy parents?”

“Our true Father,” answered he, “is Christ: our true mother is the Faith, whereby we believe in Him. As to my earthly parents, they are dead: I myself have been brought hither from Lycaonia, in Phrygia.”

The Prefect then said to Liberianus :

“And what hast thou to say for thyself? art thou also a Christian, and a despiser of the gods?”

“Yes,” said the Martyr; “I too am a Christian, for I worship and adore the only true God.”

Rusticus now again addressed Justin: “Hearken thou,” he said, “thou who art deemed eloquent, and who sayest, that thou professest the true philosophy: when thou art torn with scourges from head to foot, thinkest thou to ascend into heaven?”

"Yes," answered Justin, "if I endure what you mention, I hope to receive that which is even now possessed by those who have kept the precepts of Christ. For I know, that the grace of God is reserved unto the end of time for them that live in this holy manner."

"Dost thou imagine, then, that thou shalt go up into heaven, there to receive some reward?"

"I do not imagine this: I know it, and I am so certain thereof, that I do not entertain the least doubt."

"To end all this," said the Prefect, "let us come to the point. Go ye all together, and, with one accord, sacrifice to the gods."

"No one who possesses good sense," replied Justin, "abandons his pious duty to throw himself into error and impiety."

"Unless ye be willing to obey our commands," added Rusticus, "ye shall all be tortured without mercy."

"We long for nothing more ardently," said the holy Martyr, "than for torments undergone for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Lord. This will give us confidence to stand before His dread tribunal, where the whole world must one day appear to be judged."

The other Martyrs spoke in like manner, and

added: "Do speedily whatever you choose. We are Christians: we sacrifice not to idols."

The Prefect hearing this, pronounced the sentence: let them, who were unwilling to sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the edict of the Emperor, be first scourged, and then led to the place of execution; there to be beheaded according to the laws." Thus the Martyrs were led forth, thanking and praising God for the grace bestowed upon them. After their Martyrdom, the Christians secretly took away their bodies, and gave them a decent burial.

Such was the end of St. Justin, deservedly surnamed the Martyr or Witness; for he bore witness to the truth, not only by shedding his blood for the Faith, like very many others, but also by his words and writings. In him the title of Philosopher became truly a name of honor; he was a sage in very deed, in that he consecrated his talents to the noblest of causes—the service of the Giver of every excellent gift, and the everlasting happiness of his fellow-men.

He suffered in the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, most probably in the year 167 of the Christian Era.



## IV.

### THE MARTYRS OF LYONS AND VIENNE.

IN THE thirteenth year of his reign, Marcus Aurelius obtained, by the prayers of the Christian soldiers, his celebrated victory over the Quadi. In consequence he showed himself, for some time, more favorable to Christianity. But toleration was not one of his characteristic qualities, unless, indeed, his countenancing the most absurd superstitions and the most enormous profligacy may deserve that name. Hypocrisy and bare-faced crime appeared not objectionable to this imperial philosopher, but virtue and innocence of life seemed not to be endured. Wherefore, persecution, with all its terrors, was soon renewed against his Christian subjects. The blood of Martyrs flowed again in streams, especially in the more distant provinces of the Empire. And now, for the first time on record, Gaul was heard of in

the Annals of the Church: her faith, her charity were a fresh garland to deck the blood-stained brow of the spotless Bride of the Lamb.

Commercial intercourse between Massilia and the Greek colonies of Asia Minor had, at an early period, introduced the Christian Religion among the Celtic tribes of Gaul. Hence it happened, that most of the early prelates, who, by their virtues, adorned the Church of Gaul, were of Greek origin; hence, too, the intimate relation kept up between these countries. When, therefore, the sword of persecution was unsheathed among the Gallic nations, we need not wonder that they should recount the history of their struggle and triumph to them, from whom they had received their knowledge of Christianity. Lyons and Vienne, two cities on the Rhone, were the first to send forth their children as champions of the Faith. The recital of the sufferings which they underwent, forms one of the brightest pages in the history of the Church: it is the testimony of eye-witnesses, who themselves had been partakers of the tribulations of their brethren.

“The servants of Christ, who dwell in Vienne and Lyons of Gaul, to our brethren of Asia and Phrygia, who cherish with us the same faith and hope

of Redemption: peace and grace and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

“No language can express, nor can pen describe, the severity of the persecution, the rage of the heathen against the Saints, and the cruelty of the torments which our blessed Martyrs underwent, with the most wonderful constancy. The enemy of mankind seemed to display against us his whole strength, as if he were desirous of showing, beforehand, how great shall be his fury at the end of time, when he shall be allowed to exercise his power against the servants of God. He left nothing untried. We were not only forbidden to enter public buildings, the baths, the forum, but we were not even allowed to make our appearance in any public place whatsoever.

“The grace of God, however, struggled for us against the powers of hell. He, in His mercy, protected the weak, and permitted that the strong alone should stand forth, like immovable columns, against which the fierceness of the enemy was spent in vain. When these heroes came in close conflict, they bore every kind of reproach and insult; yet all this they esteemed light, and joyously they ran their race, hastening on toward Christ, teaching us, by their example, that the sufferings

of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, which shall be revealed in us."

They began by generously enduring, for the love of their divine Master, whatsoever a barbarous multitude can inflict upon them, whom they view as the fit objects of their vengeance: insolent speeches, the plundering of their property, imprisonment, blows, and the throwing of stones. Afterward, being dragged into the forum, they were publicly interrogated by the military tribune and the magistrates of the city, and, having made a bold confession of their faith, they were cast into prison until the arrival of the Governor of the Province. So soon as this officer had come, they were summoned before his tribunal. Without examining the truthfulness of the accusations brought against them, he ordered them to be tortured in the most cruel manner.

On this occasion, Vettius Epagathus gave a beautiful example of Christian freedom and charity. He was a youth of illustrious birth, but still more distinguished for his many virtues. They that knew him, hesitated not to bestow upon him the praises given to the aged Zachary, that "he was just before God, and walked in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame."

With the rest of the multitude he had come to be present at the public trial of the Christians.

When he beheld the unjust manner in which his Brethren were treated, he was unable to contain the indignation of his noble nature.

"Suffer me," he said, addressing the Governor, "to speak in the defense of these innocent persons. I am ready to prove, that they are falsely accused of atheism and impiety; that they are guilty of none of the accusations brought forward against them."

The crowd that surrounded the tribunal were astonished on hearing this speech; they began to cry out against him. The Governor was surprised at so unexpected a request; he began to waver in mind, not knowing whether he should grant or refuse so just a demand. He reflected for a few moments, and then addressing the youth, said: "Tell me, Epagathus, art thou a Christian?"

"I am a Christian, and glory in the name," said Epagathus, in a loud and clear voice.

"Then," said the Governor, "thou shalt not speak in their defense. Take thy stand among them who are accused: their sentence shall be thy own."

His Brethren joyfully received him in their

midst; with one voice they bestowed on him the title of "Advocate of the Christians!"—glorious name, which he did fairly merit, because, more than Zachary, he possessed within him the Holy Spirit, the Advocate and Comforter. He gave a new impulse to the strength and fervor of the holy Confessors: his burning charity cheered them on with greater courage and alacrity to shed their blood for the sake of the Lamb, whose true follower he proved himself by this glorious example.

These first trials showed also the difference that existed between the Christians, who had prepared themselves beforehand for the great struggle, and those who had not used the same foresight. The former did not hesitate to declare boldly, that the object of their most ardent longing was to seal with their blood the profession of their faith; the latter, on the contrary, shrunk from the duty they owed to God and to their conscience. Of these, about ten fell away. This apostasy filled the hearts of the Brethren with the greatest sorrow, and cooled, to a considerable extent, the zeal of those who had not yet been arrested, and who had hitherto vied with each other in ministering to the Martyrs in their sufferings. A new species of torment seemed now

to have been added to their pains: it was not a dread of the rack, but a distressing anxiety concerning the final issue of the combat. Where one had yielded to fear, others might be misled to imitate the fatal weakness.

Meanwhile, every day some of the most distinguished members of the two Churches of Vienne and Lyons were added to the number of the prisoners. It was, doubtless, because Providence deigned in this manner to fill up the ranks of the faithful, thinned by the cowardly desertion of the few who, for the apparent enjoyment of the things of time, gave up the abiding possessions of eternity. The Governor had given peremptory orders, that all, who were in any manner connected with the Christians, should be seized; hence it happened, that many Pagans in the service of the Brethren were taken with their masters. At the sight of the tortures endured by the Saints, and instigated by the malice of Satan and of the soldiers, these wretches at once began to accuse the Christians of every crime and abomination capable of arousing the wrath of the persecutors. Now even they, who, by a common feeling of humanity, or on account of the relationship that existed between them and some of the Brethren, had hitherto restrained their raging passions, seemed no longer

to set any bounds to their spirit of revenge. Then indeed appeared to be fulfilled that saying of our divine Master: "The hour will come, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth a service to God."

Then the holy Martyrs suffered torments beyond description; Satan seemed to use every exertion to force them to utter some blasphemy. But more especially was the fury of the Governor and of the mob displayed against Sanctus, the holy Deacon of Vienne, against Maturus, who, although but a recent convert, showed himself an intrepid champion of our holy Faith.

Next to these, they assailed Attalus, a native of Pergamus, who had been long known as a pillar and firm support of the Church. But the Martyr, whose heroic fortitude excited the admiration of the Pagans themselves, was a young bond-woman, named Blandina. In her, God, in His wisdom and for the consolation of His servants, vouchsafed to show forth the wonders which His all-powerful grace can effect. For she, whose age, whose sex and condition, according to human views, expressed whatsoever there is weak and lowly among men, was seen to triumph, after a manner wholly unusual even among the noblest and bravest heroes of Religion. All the brethren, who knew her, were full



of uneasiness about this tender maiden. Her mistress, who also was of the number of the holy Martyrs, though aware of her devoted attachment to the principles of her faith, was full of anxiety lest the natural delicacy of her constitution should give way before the inhuman treatment of the executioners. But the sequel was, in very deed, to all the faithful an agreeable and a most consoling disappointment. The torturers appeared resolved, to exhaust upon her whatsoever cruelties their fiendish malice could suggest: they put her to every torment which their ferocity could invent. From morning until night, they pierced and tore asunder her virginal body. Yet, although they relieved and succeeded each other constantly, they were at last forced to confess, that grace from on high had enabled the feeble and timid maiden to baffle all their endeavors; that they were themselves at a loss to devise new means, whereby to overcome her miraculous perseverance.

Blandina, like a generous athlete, seemed to draw new strength from every effort used against her; in the midst of all her sufferings her soul appeared absorbed in the contemplation of her Lord, for whom she was willingly and cheerfully enduring this great agony. She uttered not a word of com-

plaint, nor did she threaten her executioners with the wrath of heaven:—

“I am a Christian. No evil is committed amongst us.” These few words were a sweet refreshment to her heart.

The fortitude of Sanctus, the Deacon, was not less marvelous than that of the humble Blandina. The executioners put together all their skill in their endeavor to invent new torments. They would have been satisfied had they been able to force from him some word or expression, which they might interpret as disrespectful to the Religion for which he suffered. All their attempts proved futile. So great was his constancy, that he did not even mention his name, his birth-place, nor whether he was bond or free. To every question put to him, he replied, with unwavering firmness, in the Latin tongue:—

“I am a Christian.”

This was to him his name, his country, his condition, his all; he needed no other title. This steadfast conduct of the Martyr so irritated the Governor, that he ordered the executioners, while they were apparently at a loss to discover new instruments of torture, to apply red-hot plates of brass to the most tender parts of his body. But the Saint remained unsubdued and unshaken, firm

in the confession of his faith. For Christ, the Fountain of living water, poured over his servant a celestial dew, which refreshed and strengthened him. And, although his body, mangled and shriveled, was but one continued wound—so as to have lost the appearance of a human form—yet the Christian hero glorified God by his calm and peaceful resignation, and put to shame all the machinations of the enemy of mankind. Who is not filled with admiration on beholding so grand, and, at the same time, so terrific a display of the power of heavenly grace in a weak mortal?

A few days thereafter, the inhuman tormentors resolved to put once more to the trial the constancy of this blessed Martyr. They imagined that, even if they did not subdue him, his death, in the midst of such sufferings, would strike terror into the other Christians. His wounds were now so swollen and inflamed, that the least touch caused him an excruciating agony. It was a harrowing spectacle to behold this innocent victim again led forth to the rack. All felt persuaded that the renewal of torments would speedily end his sufferings forever. But how great was their astonishment when they saw, that this trial, instead of producing immediate death, gave, on the contrary, new life and vigor to the Martyr. His limbs, disfigured

and dislocated before, resumed their former shape : he stood firm and erect in the midst of his tormentors ; and, through the grace of Christ, these second wounds became the healing of the first.

The evil one, being thus foiled in his attempts, now assailed those whom, he thought, it would not be so difficult to overcome.

Among the few who, terrified at the greatness of the torments inflicted, had renounced the faith, there was a woman, Biblis by name. The demon, aware of the bodily weakness of this person, felt assured that it would be easy to secure her for his prey. Wherefore he suggested to the executioners to have her placed upon the rack, that thus she might be induced to revile Christianity. This trial was to her wholly unexpected. But, suddenly, the thought of the everlasting punishments of the life to come recalled her to better sentiments. She remembered that, after all, the sufferings of this world, how great soever they may be, are transitory. Her heart was changed, and turned in penitence to the Father of mercies. Her tormentors said to her :—

“Biblis, confess that the Christians commit every kind of crime, that they even devour their own children, and we will set thee free.”

“How could I give utterance to such a false-

hood," she replied, "when, so far from eating their own children, they even abstain from the blood of animals?"

"So then," they said, "thou art still a follower of that odious religion?"

"I am indeed unworthy," she answered, "on account of my sins, to be reckoned among its true followers; but yet I am a Christian."

"Now," they said again, "renounce forthwith that profession, and thou art free."

"Do ye with me," she made answer, "as ye think fit. As for me, whether living or dying, I am a Christian: nothing shall ever prevail upon me to forsake my faith."

Surprised at her wonderful courage, and altogether disappointed in their expectations, they ordered her to be replaced among the other Martyrs.

Meanwhile, the grace of our Lord having enabled the holy Confessors to triumph over all the tortures which had been inflicted upon them, the demon devised a new plan to subdue their constancy. He suggested that they should be cast into a dismal and loathsome dungeon. Here they were confined in the stocks, and their feet most cruelly stretched even to the fifth hole. Here, too, they were forced to undergo all those other torments, which the

ministers of Satan could invent against the unfortunate victims of their hatred. Many of them perished by being suffocated in this noisome place—God permitting that it should be so for His glory. The others,—although they had been so inhumanly tortured, that it seemed impossible for them to survive their wounds, even had every care been bestowed upon them—continued for a long time to drag out a life of intense suffering, destitute of all human help and comfort. Nor was this sufficient for their zeal: so strengthened were they from above, that, not only by the example of their resignation, but also by their words and cheerful conduct, they imparted consolation to those who had been recently imprisoned, and whose bodies were not yet used to the hardships and privations of this barbarous treatment.

But one of the most illustrious victims of this dreadful persecution was the blessed Pothinus, the venerable Bishop of Lyons. He was now past the ninetieth year of his age, his body bowed down beneath the weight of years and of infirmities. Yet, although the flesh was weak, the spirit was ready. He longed with an eager desire for the glory of Martyrdom. He was arrested. But so great was the weakness of his body, that he was unable to walk; the soldiers dragged him before the tribunal.

The magistrates of the city, and the people in crowds, followed him: they uttered shouts of derision and insult, even as the Jews of old had followed the Redeemer on His sorrowful journey to Calvary. But nothing could shake the constancy of the holy old man. When asked by the Governor, who he was, and what profession he followed, the Martyr replied:—

“I am a Bishop in the Church of God.”

The Governor sneeringly said:—

“Who is this God, in whose Church thou art a Bishop?”

“You shall know it,” answered Pothinus, “if you are worthy of so great a blessing.”

No sooner had he uttered these words than they who stood near him, without regard for his gray hairs and venerable appearance, began to heap upon him every sort of indignity. They struck and kicked him, they dragged him from one place to another; whilst those who were at a distance pelted him with stones, and with whatsoever missile they found at hand. All seemed to act as if they would have thought themselves guilty of a great crime, had they not, in some measure, contributed to avenge the honor of their gods. Worn down by this cruel treatment, and almost lifeless, the holy Martyr was thrown into prison, where, after

two days, he yielded up his spirit to his Maker, for whose glory he had so generously combated.

Then was seen a wonderful effect of the interposition of divine Providence. They who had denied their Religion were imprisoned in the same dungeon with them who had continued faithful, and were made to share all their sufferings. But how great was the difference between them! The apostates were confined as murderers and infamous criminals. They had looked for freedom, and found the most degrading slavery; they thought to gain the good will and favor of the persecutors; they met everywhere the scorn and contempt of the populace. Worried with remorse of conscience, their look of dejection, whensoever they appeared in public, bespoke the anguish of soul they were enduring. Despised as vile and effeminate cowards, they suffered all the harrowing tortures of despair. On the other hand, the champions of the Faith were accused of nought, save of being Christians. Hence, the expectation of Martyrdom, the hope of the promises, the love of Christ, the Spirit of the Father filled their hearts with unspeakable joy. Whensoever they came forth, cheerfulness and majesty were depicted on their countenances; their chains were to them a graceful ornament; their wounds ex-

haled so sweet a fragrance, that many imagined they had been anointed with the most exquisite perfumes. All this left so consoling an impression upon the minds of the Faithful, and so strengthened them in their religious belief, that, so soon as any of them were seized and dragged before the tribunal, they forthwith made a bold confession of their Faith, without listening even for a moment, to the evil suggestions of the prince of darkness.

A few days later, the Governor decided to finish the Martyrdom of the holy Confessors by various sorts of torments. Divine Providence, doubtless, permitted this, that the heroic sufferers might in this manner present to their heavenly King a crown composed of a variety of flowers of virtue, and that the sweet blending of colors might render their offering more agreeable to Him. Besides, it was befitting that these courageous athletes, who had bravely conquered in so many and varied struggles, should receive an immortal crown, which bore witness to the multitudinous victories they had won. For this purpose Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and Attalus were condemned to be exposed to the beasts in the amphitheatre, and a special day was appointed to satisfy the barbarous curiosity of the people.

Maturus and Sanctus were again made to undergo

all the torments they had suffered before. No account was taken of the past. They were like peerless champions who, after they have overthrown all their antagonists, are made to exhibit the last trial of their skill and courage. Their wounds, but partially healed, were opened again by the customary scourging; they were torn to pieces by the fangs of wild beasts; in short, whatever torture the people called for in their madness, was inflicted upon them. At last, they were placed upon an iron chair made red hot; being thus, in very deed, roasted alive, the fumes of their own burning flesh almost suffocated them to death. Yet, no feeling of mercy or sympathy was shown by the spectators; on the contrary, their raving madness seemed to increase with the horrible sufferings of their victims. All the multitude appeared resolved to subdue the patience of the Martyrs, even at the sacrifice of every sentiment of humanity. The rage of hell, however, proved powerless. No word of complaint was uttered by the sufferers; but ever and anon Sanctus would say, as he had done before:—

“Everlasting thanks to God: I am a Christian.”

Then, during a whole day, did these servants of God present to the barbarous crowd the saddest of spectacles; and, when the frightful con-

flict was over at last, as life was not yet extinct, they were dispatched with the sword of the executioner.

And now again were orders given to torture the maiden Blandina. Forthwith she was bound to the stake, her arms extended in the form of a cross; thus, in this helpless state, to become an easy prey to the wild beasts of the amphitheatre, let loose against her. Whilst in this position, her spirit held communion with her Heavenly Bridegroom, and she prayed aloud:—

“I thank Thee, O my sweet Redeemer, for that Thou deemest Thy servant worthy of suffering for Thy dear sake. Grant us to persevere in Thy holy service. Our tribulations here below are light and short-lived, and not to be compared to the immense weight of glory Thou hast prepared for us. Give us strength and courage to confess Thy name before men, that we may be made partakers of Thy joys forever.”

When the other Martyrs heard this fervent prayer of their youthful companion, their hearts were cheered up, and new vigor was infused into their frames. However, in spite of the efforts made by the executioners, they were unable to excite the wild beasts so as to make them even touch the body of the Virgin Martyr. Less fierce than the savage

persecutors, they laid themselves calmly down at her feet. Hence, frustrated in their design, the executioners unbound Blandina and cast her again into prison, that thus, in the providence of God, she might still continue a model for her Brethren, and encourage them in their struggles.

After this, the multitude began with loud vociferations to call for Attalus. This holy Confessor was well known to all the people. He was a man of distinguished birth, of irreproachable character, and well-versed in the principles of Religion. As he had ever been foremost in the profession of his Faith, he now exhibited the greatest readiness to bear witness to the truth. So soon as he entered the arena, he was led round the amphitheatre. Before him was carried a tablet with a Latin inscription: "*This is Attalus, the Christian.*" The mob shouted at the sight: opprobrious epithets of every sort were heaped upon him. All clamored for the blood of the Martyr. The Governor, however, was told that Attalus was a Roman citizen. As it was unlawful to punish a Roman citizen in this ignominious manner, it was found necessary to write first to the Emperor, to learn his pleasure. Wherefore, Attalus was again imprisoned with the other Christians.

This postponement of the final struggle was by

no means useless to them: the Saviour of men made it an occasion of displaying the wonders of His infinite mercy. The unhappy individuals who, at the first trial, had been frightened at the sight of the tortures prepared for them, were still deprived of their freedom. Now, when they beheld the Confessors of the Faith returning in triumph from the arena, they were filled with self-reproach at their own cowardly behavior. This first working of divine grace made them enter into themselves: they saw the evil they had brought upon their souls, the glory they had forsaken, and the wretched future that awaited them. With tears of repentance they began to entreat the Martyrs to intercede for them, and to obtain the pardon of their disgraceful apostasy. With a charity that ever characterizes the true Christian hero, they received their repentant brethren again into fellowship, and thus was the grief they had felt before turned once more into joy. Nor was it long before the new converts were enabled to prove by deeds the sincerity of their return to God. An order came from the Emperor, directing that they who confessed their Faith should be put to death, and they that denied Christianity should be set free.

In consequence of this order, the Governor fixed the first of August, as the time for the execution of

the sentence. On that day, a public fair was held in the city of Lyons, which attracted many strangers from all the neighboring towns and provinces. When the appointed day came, the Governor seated himself on his tribunal, and commanded the Martyrs to be brought before him, to undergo a second public interrogatory. This he did, both to gratify the curiosity of the numerous visitors, and to strike with terror those who might feel kindly disposed toward the Christians. First he interrogated those that had remained steadfast in the Faith. They who were Roman citizens were condemned to be beheaded; the others were sentenced to be torn to pieces by the wild beasts of the amphitheatre. When came the turn of those who had before apostatized, the Governor gave orders that they should be questioned in private, through mere formality, and then restored to liberty. But great was the astonishment of the Pagans, when those men, who had shown so great a weakness heretofore, now boldly confessed their Faith, and declared themselves ready to suffer every torture, rather than again forsake that Religion, into which they had been born again. Wherefore, they were condemned to undergo the same sentence as the other Christians.

Meanwhile, many of the Faithful were present at

these interrogatories to encourage their heroic brethren. Among them was a certain Alexander, a Phrygian by birth, a physician by profession. During the many years which he spent in Gaul, he had ever distinguished himself by his many virtues, his love of God, and the apostolical freedom where-with he proclaimed the truths of the Gospel. This holy man, standing near the tribunal, by signs and gestures cheered on the Martyrs to a bold and generous confession of their Faith. This did not long escape the notice of the people. Sorely annoyed at seeing those constant in their Faith, who had formerly renounced it, they began forth-with to cry out :

“There is Alexander : he it is who causes these men to return to their old superstition. Away with him !”

The Governor, addressing Alexander, said to him :

“Who art thou ?”

“I am a Christian,” answered Alexander.

“What is thy profession ?”

“I am a Christian,” again replied Alexander.

“Away with him, then,” said the Governor, “to the beasts of the amphitheatre.”

Wherefore, on the following day, Alexander was led into the arena, together with Attalus, whom the Governor had also condemned to this kind of punish-

ment, in spite of his being a Roman citizen. Here they were made to endure all the torments which were usually inflicted in the amphitheatre, till at last they were beheaded. Whilst he was tortured, Alexander uttered neither groan nor complaint, but his soul, in sweet communion with God, seemed unconscious of the sufferings of the body. But when Attalus was placed in the red-hot iron chair, and when the fumes of his roasting limbs were almost suffocating him, he said to the people, in Latin :

“Behold what you are now doing ; this is what may be called to devour men. As for us we neither eat men, nor do we commit any other crimes.”

Some of the multitude said to him :

“Tell us, what is the name of thy God?”

“God,” replied Attalus, “hath no name like we mortals have.”

On the last day of the gladiatorial games, when all the other Martyrs had gone to receive their crown, the Virgin Blandina was again brought into the amphitheatre. She was accompanied by a youth of about fifteen years of age, Ponticus by name. During the struggle of the other Confessors, they had daily been forced to witness the cruelties endured by their Brethren, that this inhuman sight might induce them to forsake their Religion.

“Swear by the immortal gods of the Empire, and offer incense to them,” was the order unceasingly repeated.

“We adore the one, true God ; we despise your idols,” was the ever ready reply of the faithful followers of Christ.

The Pagans were enraged when they saw how useless were their attempts to overcome the constancy of the youthful Christians. At first, indeed, they seemed to feel some commiseration for them, on account of the child-like appearance of the one, and the sex of the other. But when they perceived that the fortitude of these champions of the Faith was far beyond the years, sex, and condition of ordinary mortals, their fury knew no longer any bounds. Whatever new torments could be devised, were immediately heaped upon them. When Blandina beheld her companion writhing with agony, forgetful of her own sufferings, she exclaimed :

“Courage, Ponticus, a few moments more : joys never ending are awaiting thee.”

Thus comforted by the cheering words of his heroic sister, Ponticus generously underwent every torture, until his body presented but a bleeding mass of torn flesh, and his spirit went to join the glorious company of his martyred Brethren.

Last of all, Blandina,—as a noble mother that had animated her children to the combat, and sent them crowned with victory to the heavenly King,—now passing again through the same trials, hastened joyfully after them. After she had been scourged, she was thrown to the wild beasts, and her bleeding limbs were roasted in the iron chair. Then, being put into a net, she was cast before a mad bull, that tossed and gored her for a long time, till, apparently insensible to all sufferings, her throat was cut—thus becoming in very deed a victim immolated at the altar. The Pagans themselves, struck with astonishment at the extraordinary power of endurance displayed by this Christian maiden, candidly acknowledged, that they did not think it possible to suffer so long, so much, and so heroically, unless some supernatural aid had been vouchsafed.

However, the blood of the Martyrs did not satisfy the hatred and fury of the wicked. The demon, who had instigated them to their crime, prompted them also to rage against the lifeless bodies of the Servants of God. Reason and every feeling of humanity seemed to have forsaken both the people and the Governor. The remains of those who had died in prison were thrown to the dogs, and a strict guard was kept, both night and day, lest the Christians might carry them off and give them a decent

burial. The heads and mangled limbs of those who had suffered Martyrdom in the amphitheatre, were put together, and a band of soldiers prevented the Brethren from approaching them. Some of the more malevolent gnashed their teeth, at the sight of these holy relics, and sought an occasion to heap still greater outrages upon them: others scoffed at them, praising the idols, to whose vengeance they attributed the death of the Martyrs. Even they who had been more moderate, and they who seemed to exhibit some sympathy for the sufferings of the innocent victims, now gave utterance to their malignant feelings, and said:

“Where is now their God? what hath this religion, which they preferred to life itself, profited them?” Such were the sentiments and expressions of the Gentiles. The Brethren, meanwhile, felt the deepest concern, because they were unable to gain possession of the sacred remains.

The consequence of this anxiety of the Christians to bestow the last rites of a dutiful affection upon their departed friends, was a continual struggle between themselves and the soldiers. Again and again, in the dark of the night, did they watch for an opportunity to carry off the venerated remains; but in vain. Neither entreaties, nor the power of gold had any effect upon the guards: they preferred

to all this the barbarous pleasure of seeing the bodies of them, whom they hated without cause, mouldering into dust, without the honors of sepulture. Hence, during six days, the bodies of the Martyrs lay exposed to the insults of the mob; after this they were burnt, and the ashes cast into the Rhone—so that no relic might remain of them. The Pagans did this, because they knew that the Christians believed in the resurrection of the body, and they saw that this belief made them quite regardless of the transitory things of the present life, causing them to centre all their hopes on the everlasting one to come. “Now,” they said, “let us see, whether they will ever return to life again; or whether their God can snatch them out of our hands.”

These Martyrs suffered in the beginning of the pontificate of St. Eleutherius, A. D. 177. They were forty-eight in number. Some of their relics were afterwards miraculously recovered, and were deposited under the altar of the Church, which was anciently called the Church of the Apostles of Lyons.





## V.

### ALEXANDER AND EPIPODIUS.

**A**T the time when the persecution was raging at Lyons, very many of the Christians followed the counsel given us by our Lord: "When they shall persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." They who dwelt in the city thought it proper to avoid appearing in public, until the excitement had to a great extent abated. Hence it happened, that the Pagans, seeing the result of their inhuman proceedings against the followers of Christ, boasted that they had exterminated not only the Christians, but the very name of their Religion. However, the Gentiles may rage, and the people devise vain things; the kings of the earth may rise up, and princes meet together against the Lord and His Anointed: all their attempts shall at last prove useless.

At that time, there lived in Lyons two youthful

friends, Epipodius and Alexander by name. The former was a native of the city, the latter was, by birth, a Greek. Both of illustrious families, they were even more distinguished by their virtues and innocency of life. From their tenderest years the ties of genuine friendship had bound them together. The same studies and literary pursuits had united them still more closely. As they advanced in years and knowledge, their intimacy grew also stronger, because they learned to encourage each other in the practice of the greatest virtues and the highest perfection. Nor was their success less than the zeal with which they applied themselves to holiness of life. Temperance, poverty, chastity, faith, every work of mercy, made them beforehand victims worthy to be immolated one day on the altar of Religion: yea, by anticipation, they appeared to enjoy all the merit of Martyrdom before wearing its crown. Free from all worldly ties, as their hearts so their outward behavior had ever continued wholly unsullied. So simple and unobtrusive had been their manner of living, that none of the Pagans seemed to suspect that they were professors of a Religion which the malice of Satan had rendered odious in their eyes. For, it was nothing unusual, even in those days, that young persons of wealth and distinction should not engage in public

affairs, but devote themselves to science and philosophy. Yet, when the hour of trial came, the two youths were betrayed to the authorities by those to whom they had ever shown the greatest kindness—their own domestics.

The Governor of the Province, indignant because two persons so well known had been enabled to elude his grasp, ordered them to be seized without delay. But Alexander and Epipodius, aware of their danger, succeeded in making their escape. They concealed themselves near the city, in the cottage of a Christian widow of great piety and fidelity. Here they lived for some time in perfect security; for none suspected that a dwelling of so lowly an appearance could be the hiding-place of the two young men. Here they served God with thankfulness for His present protection, and, by prayer and penitential exercises, prepared themselves for whatsoever destiny His providence might have reserved for them thereafter. At last, however, a spy discovered their place of concealment, and soon returned with a band of the Governor's guards to arrest them. They endeavored once more to make their escape, and in his flight Epipodius lost one of his shoes, which was afterwards found by their kind hostess, who preserved it as a most precious treasure—and so, indeed, it proved to be.



No sooner were they arrested, than, contrary to the Roman laws, without a previous interrogatory, they were thrown into prison; because the very name of Christian seemed a crime sufficiently great to warrant such a treatment.

Three days after, the noble youths were led as prisoners before the tribunal of the Governor. A vast multitude of people filled the *Prætorium*, all eager to hear the condemnation of the two Confessors of the Faith, and to see them put to the torture. The magistrate, assuming a look of the utmost severity, and with a voice that betrayed his inward wrath, asked them :

“Who are ye, young men? what is your name and your profession?”

They, without exhibiting the least emotion of fear, answered :

“Our names are Alexander and Epipodius; by profession we are Christians.”

“What!” said the Governor, foaming with rage, “know ye not, that I have sworn to exterminate the very name of that odious Religion?”

“We know not what you have sworn,” they modestly replied, “but this we know, that we are Christians, and faithful subjects of the Empire.”

“Faithful subjects, indeed,” he exclaimed with a sneer. “Impudent young men, who dare to insult



the immortal gods themselves! who set at naught the sacred ordinances of our princes! Is it then to no purpose that I have used the rack, the cross, the sword, the wild beasts of the amphitheatre, the torments of fire—protracted even beyond death? Whence such rashness? whence such insolence?"

"We are neither rash nor insolent," they said; "we are dutiful to our rulers, in whatever things wherein they have a right to command. But as Christians, we know that the Supreme Ruler of all things has the first claim on our obedience."

"Dare ye still utter that hated name of Christian! Unless ye do forthwith renounce your unholy profession, and adore the gods of Cæsar, ye shall suffer the severest penalties of the laws."

"We are willing to undergo our torments," they answered, "but we cannot do that which is contrary to the dictates of our reason and conscience."

Thereupon the Governor gave orders, that the two friends should be separated, lest by words and signs they might encourage each other to fight bravely for the Faith. Wherefore, Alexander, who was the eldest, was hurried away to a dungeon, and Epipodius left alone to face the struggle.

The Governor, imagining that it would not be difficult to overcome the opposition of the youth, now that he had not the presence and example of

his more experienced friend to cheer him on, resolved to try the effect of blandishment. Using the artful cunning of the serpent of old, he endeavored to instil into his mind the secret poison by means of soft words—which are so frequently effective where harshness is wont to fail.

“I see,” said he, “that thou art a youth of good sense, and of an amiable disposition. What a pity it would be, wert thou to persevere and perish in defense of so wretched a cause. I know, that the virtues of piety and religion animate thy heart; but thou needest not forsake these. Thinkest thou that we, and our august Emperors, are devoid of similar sentiments? Have we not a religion and temples and gods? All nations worship our deities, and herein do but follow the example of our pious sovereigns. It is true, our gods love to see their worshippers happy and joyful: we honor them amidst banquets, and songs, and games, and pleasures of every sort that can delight the senses. Man is born for happiness, and, faithful to our destiny, we endeavor to realize it whilst we live. But the Christians follow a Religion of pain and cheerlessness. They adore a man who was nailed to a cross, who condemns all men that enjoy the good things of this life, who commands his worshippers to pass their days in fasting and penance,

who counsels a chastity which is selfish and profitless. And, after all, of what assistance to any one can that God be, who was unable to defend Himself against the persecution of the vilest of wretches? Be then reasonable; follow my advice; worship the mighty gods of the Empire. Prompted by the kindest feelings, and through sympathy for thy youth and inexperience, I say these things. If thou art wise, do not rush headlong to destruction, but seize the opportunity now offered thee of enjoying the life of a prudent and noble youth."

To this insidious speech of the Governor, Epipodius answered:

"The grace of Jesus Christ, and the teaching of the Catholic Faith, have not left me so unguarded and inexperienced as to be moved by your pretended kindness toward me. Your apparent compassion is real cruelty. The life which you hold out to me, as an inducement to forsake the Religion which I profess, would be for me a certain pledge of everlasting death: the destruction wherewith you threaten me, is a transition from danger and misery to a bliss that knows no ending. To perish by your hands, accustomed to shed the blood of the innocent, and to seal the truth with my blood, is the object of my highest aspirations. Moreover, this God, whom you mention, and whom we adore

as the true and only Sovereign Lord of the universe, do you know, that by His own power, He rose again from among the dead? For, being both God and man, by an unutterable mystery, He opened for His servants the way to immortality, and prepared for them thrones of glory in the everlasting kingdom of His Father. But I perceive that these sublime truths are altogether beyond the reach of your unenlightened understanding: I will, for your sake, make use of the ordinary language of men. Is your mind so blind as not to know, that man consists of a two fold substance—spirit and matter—a body and a soul? Among us Christians the soul commands; the body obeys. The infamous pleasures wherein ye indulge, to serve your gods—as you say—may perhaps delight the body, but they kill the soul. What sort of a life, then, can that be which gratifies the meaner part and brings destruction to that which is the nobler? We Christians, we wage an unceasing war, for the sake of the soul, against the evil inclinations of the body: her we defend against every assault, whencesoever it may come, that would sully her purity. Do not boast to me of your piety and religion. I know, that your God is your belly: to that one ye offer your sacrifices. Your life is like that of the irrational animals; and with your death you im-

agine there is an end of all things. But we, when we die by your torments and persecutions, are certain that, from a temporary and transitory existence, we pass into a life of unending blissfulness."

The Governor could not withhold an expression of astonishment, when he heard so youthful a person discoursing in this manner. His admiration, however, did not continue long.

"Tell me," he said to Epipodius, "dost thou really believe all these pretty fables, whereon thy hopes of the hereafter are founded?"

"The things which I have uttered," replied the youth, "are not fables but truths, which I do not only believe, but of which I am certain."

"Men of sense, however, deem them absurd and ridiculous," said the Governor.

"All men of good sense," replied Epipodius, "your own philosophers included, have ever, at least substantially, believed and taught the same things."

"Ah! I see. Thou art not only well-taught thyself, but art able to teach even us."

"What we know well," said Epipodius, "it is not difficult to communicate to others: neither is it unbecoming in youth to make known the truth to the aged, who are ignorant thereof."

"Such freedom and insolence," said the Governor,

growing angry, "must not be tolerated. Young man, if reason cannot subdue thee, I will see what blows can effect." Whereupon he ordered him to be struck on the mouth. The pain caused by this blow did by no means depress the spirits of the holy youth. As he spit from his mouth the blood and several of his teeth, he said :

"I confess, that Jesus Christ is one God, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost. I deem it meet that I should restore to Him my soul, which He not only gave me, but also ransomed with His own Sacred Blood. For I know, that, by dying, life is not taken away from me, but my present existence is changed into one immeasurably better. Then, it matters little in what manner this earthly dwelling of my soul is destroyed, provided my spirit freed from this body, be admitted into the everlasting joys of heaven."

No sooner had the youthful Confessor uttered these words than the Governor, unable to contain his anger at the holy freedom of the servant of Christ, ordered him to be stretched upon the rack. Whilst he was thus placed in a helpless position, the executioners tore his sides with iron hooks. However, this cruel torture did not satisfy the savage brutality of the mob. They cried out, that the Martyr should be delivered up to them. "If he

can endure your torments," they said to the Governor, "let us see whether he will not yield to the punishment which we know how to inflict."

On this they began to pick up stones to hurl them at the bleeding victim of their fury : others begged to be allowed to tear him to pieces.

Meanwhile, Epipodius, calm and resigned, and apparently unconscious of the excitement of which he was the innocent cause, held inward communion with his Saviour, the meditation on whose sufferings gave him strength and courage to suffer all things. The Governor, perceiving the evil disposition of the people, and fearing lest he himself might become the object of their hatred, ordered the Martyr to be taken from the rack. Then he had him secretly conveyed to a distance, and, before the mob seemed aware of what was going on, Epipodius was beheaded. Thus, by the providence of God, what promised to be the beginning of a long series of torments was, in reality, a sudden ending of the young Martyr's suffering.

Two days after the Martyrdom of his companion, the blessed Alexander was summoned before the tribunal. The Governor thought by this delay to gratify his own malice against the prisoner, and to satisfy the desire of the people, who continued to show signs of sedition, on account of their previous

disappointment. Yet, in spite of his inclination to proceed at once to extreme measures, when Alexander was brought before him, he pretended to be animated with the kindest feelings. Wherefore, addressing the young champion of the Faith, he said to him :

“ Alexander, that which thou hast already endured, and the example of thy brethren, ought to be a sufficient warning to thee, not to despise our threats.”

“ He that fears God,” replied the youth, “ needs not fear the threats of man.”

“ Remember,” continued the Governor, “ that thy destiny is in thy own hands. Thou mayest yet secure for thyself a life of happiness. Do not by thy obstinacy bring upon thyself the greatest miseries.”

“ I have no other desire,” said Alexander, “ than to secure for myself the greatest happiness. This I can obtain by confessing the name of Christ before men—even as my brethren have done. If I am judged worthy to do this, I shall soon enjoy the blessed companionship of my friends, who now rejoice in a blissful immortality.”

“ As to thy friends, I know that they have perished like miserable wretches. We have waged such a war against them, that, I dare say, thou art

the only one who canst boast of having escaped. Be wise, therefore, forsake thy impiety ; offer incense to the immortal gods, that they may protect thee against the fate of thy late companion."

Then the blessed Martyr lifted up his eyes toward heaven, and said :

"I return thanks to my God, who gives me grace to rejoice, when I hear of the torments which my brethren have undergone before me. I thank Him, because He enabled them to triumph for His glory over the powers of darkness. Do not imagine that your threats affright me ; I long to suffer even as they have suffered. Do you think that those souls, whom, by your cruelty, you have set free from their bodies, are not now living ? Be not mistaken : they possess the glory of heaven ; but their persecutors have drawn destruction upon themselves. How I pity your blindness ! The Christian name, which you flatter yourself to extinguish amidst streams of blood, is one that is imperishable : God himself is its author. The life of those who bear it guards and adorns it ; their death makes it known everywhere. Our God dwells in the heavens, which Himself hath created ; the earth is His possession ; by His justice He reigns even in hell. Remember that the souls, whom you think to destroy, together with the bodies, are taken up by Him into the

kingdom of heaven. But yourselves, together with your gods, who are demons, shall go down to hell. By putting to death my beloved brother, you have secured for him that supreme bliss which I am anxious to share with him. I am a Christian, such I have always been, and I am resolved to persevere in my Faith. You may torment my body, which, formed as it is out of the earth, is subject to the infirmities of earthly things; but my soul, which is beyond the reach of your power, will be preserved and received by Him who gave the same unto me."

The words of the generous youth enraged the Governor to such a degree that, unable to contain his pent-up feelings, he burst forth into the most violent expressions. Then, as it were ashamed of owning his defeat, he said:

"What is the use of bandying words? Young man, prepare thyself to submit at once to the law of the Empire, or suffer its vengeance."

"If I am required to do what my God forbids, I repeat it, I can never consent to defile my soul, for the sake of pleasing men."

"Thinkest thou, that this God of thine can save thee from our hands?"

"If it so pleases Him, He can and He will. But this I do not ask. I rather beg, that He give me strength and grace to confess His holy name before

men, and to bear witness to the truths He has made known to us."

"If words cannot persuade thee," said the Governor, "let us try the effect of deeds."

Thereupon, he ordered him to be stripped, and to be stretched out at full length. Then three executioners, succeeding each other, scourged the youthful athlete, until they were themselves worn down with fatigue. The heroic Alexander, however, as he lay bruised and bleeding, uttered not a groan, nor a word of complaint, only he would, now and then, raise his heart to God and say :

"God, my Saviour, grant me strength!"

His tormentors seemed at a loss what to do ; for they began to be convinced, that no efforts of their cruelty should be able to break the spirit of the noble sufferer.

At last, the Governor, concealing his vexation, said to the Martyr :

"Tell me now, Alexander, dost thou still persist in thy profession of Christianity?"

"Yes, thanks to my God, I do," replied the youth, with an accent of voice that bespoke the unshaken firmness of his Faith.

"Dost thou not think, that the God of the Christians is powerless against our gods, and that

it is in vain thou hast trusted in Him?" asked the Governor.

"The gods of the Gentiles," replied Alexander, "are wicked demons; but the All-powerful, Invisible, Eternal God, whom I adore, will give me strength to confess Him, even to my latest breath: He will guard my Faith in Him, and crown my perseverance."

Then the Governor said: "I understand the meaning of all this: these Christians have reached such a degree of madness, that they glory in the length of their sufferings, provided they can, by this means, defy those whom they call their persecutors. But they shall not long out-brave me." After which he added, in a more moderate and solemn tone: "As it is contrary to the good example which we owe to others, and to the respect due to the immortal gods, that Alexander, who is guilty of being a Christian, should be seen and heard doing and saying things unbecoming a loyal subject of the Empire, therefore we order that said Alexander be fastened to a cross, until, by his death, he atone for his crime."

When the Martyr heard this sentence, he could not contain his joy; because, although unworthy, he was condemned to die upon a cross, even as his



Redeemer had died for the expiation of the sins of men.

The executioners forthwith seized the courageous Confessor of the Faith, and fastening him to the cross, raised him up in the sight of the vast multitude. His torments did not last long, for the scourging had so torn his body and exhausted his strength, that his broken and dislocated limbs soon left his triumphant spirit free. His last words were : "Jesus, my Saviour, into Thy hands I commend my spirit !" His struggle was over : the joys of his everlasting triumph began.

The tomb united again the two noble and loving friends, whom the cruelty of the enemies of the Christian name had for a while separated. The Faithful, ever watchful to secure the remains of the champions of Religion, came during the following night, and were successful in secretly carrying off the bodies of Alexander and Epipodius. On the declivity of one of the hills near the city was a recess, overhung with shady trees ; further on was a cave, hidden from sight by the brushwood, the thorns and thistles, which the dripping of the water had caused to spring up all around. Here the Christians religiously deposited the bodies of the two Martyrs. The solitariness of the place sheltered them from a second persecution of the Pagans, who,



by a ferocity uncommon even among barbarians, would not have suffered that their innocent victims should enjoy the sacred repose of the tomb. In course of time, this lonely spot became celebrated as a place of pilgrimage, where the pious devotion of the Faithful, and the merits of the servants of God, obtained signal favors from heaven.

A contagious disease was raging among the inhabitants of Lyons. A young nobleman was attacked and soon brought to death's door. When he had given up all hope of recovery, he was warned in a dream, or rather a vision, to have recourse to a certain woman, Lucia by name, who had in her possession a remedy that would infallibly restore him to health. The woman was sent for without delay. When the charitable Lucia came to the dying youth, she at first protested that she had no knowledge of medicine; but, being informed of the vision, she candidly confessed, that she kept a treasure,—the shoe of the blessed Martyr Epipodius. Thereupon, she blessed with the shoe a cup of water, and gave it to the dying man. No sooner had he drunk the water, than, immediately, the burning fever left him, and, through the merits of the Martyr, he was restored to life and perfect health. When the circumstances of this miracle became known in the City, not only were the hearts

of the Faithful cheered up, but the Pagans themselves, forgetting their ancient animosity against their Christian fellow-citizens, rushed in crowds to the tomb of the Martyrs. Here, new miracles testified the power and clemency of the God, whose worshippers had hitherto been an object of hatred and persecution. The Christian name was exalted, and the virtues of them who had died in its defense were publicly proclaimed everywhere. Together with the health of the body, very many obtained the health of the soul ; for their eyes were opened to the truths of the Gospel ; and the more violent they had been in persecuting its professors, the more zealous they became in acknowledging its heavenly teachings, and conforming their lives to its holy precepts. Miracles daily multiplied at the tomb of the servants of God : demons left the bodies of the possessed, inveterate diseases were healed, the ailments of the soul as well as those of the body found a prompt remedy. Incredulity yielded, in spite of itself, to the evidence of facts. Thus did the Lord, who had given strength and perseverance to the two youthful friends of Lyons, glorify them before men, and thus did He force the Evil One to bow before the majesty of their innocence, for the consolation of their fellow-sufferers, and the salvation of their persecutors.



## VI.

### ST. SYMPHORIAN.

**D**URING the cruel persecution which the Emperor Marcus Aurelius set on foot against the Church of God, there lived at Autun, in Gaul, a young man, named Symphorian. Of a family distinguished for the nobility of its ancestry, no less than for its zealous profession of Christianity, his father, Faustus, had devoted his whole care to cultivate in the heart of the youthful Symphorian those precious germs of every virtue, which were to make him an honor to his illustrious race, as well as to his Religion. Nor were the pious efforts of the father disappointed. The son, faithful to the instructions which he had received, showed, even from his earliest years, a gravity of deportment, a love for true wisdom, a candor and innocence of life which edified all who came in contact with him. He seemed to have passed from childhood into



youth, without giving any indications of having anywise been exposed to the dangers which beset the path of the inexperienced. His manly virtues, his uniform and edifying conduct, did not only gain for him the esteem and admiration of the aged, but rendered him a model set up, so to speak, by Providence, that all might learn of him and copy his example. And withal, his simplicity of manners was such, that he seemed wholly unconscious of those qualities, which caused his brethren to raise their hearts in thankfulness to God, who is so marvellous in His Saints.

The city of Autun (the ancient *Augustodunum*) had long been renowned throughout Gaul for its antiquity, its schools, and its nobility, but above all for its superstitious adherence to every form of idolatry. Surrounded with temples, constantly visited by deluded worshippers, it was in very deed one of the centres of Paganism. But among the countless deities, that attracted thither large crowds from every part of Gaul, none were held in higher estimation than Cybele, Apollo, and Diana.

On a certain day, a great festival was celebrated in honor of Cybele, who was styled the mother of the gods. It happened, that Symphorian found himself at a place by which the procession was passing. When the multitude observed the youth,

they determined at once to force him to pay religious homage to their idol. But, in spite of all their efforts, they were unable to overcome the heroic opposition of Symphorian. Thereupon, they resolved to deliver him up to the Magistrate, as a sacrilegious wretch, and a despiser of the gods.

At that time, Heraclius, a person of consular dignity, was staying in Autun, whither he had come with authority from the Emperor to arrest, and punish, according to law, every Christian whom he could not induce to renounce his Faith. When Symphorian stood before the Magistrate, Heraclius said to him :

“Tell me thy name and thy condition.”

“I am a Christian, my name is Symphorian,” replied the youth.

“Art thou a Christian?” said the Judge. “Can it be possible that thou didst escape detection until now! From what I hear there seem to remain but very few of that sort of people in this neighborhood. But, tell me, why didst thou refuse to worship the mother of the gods?”

“I have said it already,” answered Symphorian, “I am a Christian. I adore the true God, who reigns in the heavens. As to my worshipping the statue of the demon, called by you the mother of the gods, give yourself no trouble about that. If,



however, you allow me, and give me a hammer, I will reduce her godship to powder."

The Judge looked indignant at this bold proposal, and was sorely puzzled. He knew not what answer to make. He gazed around him, as if he expected some one to take up the defence of the insulted idols. No one stirred. He bethought himself for a while, and then, turning himself to the crowd that surrounded the tribunal, he said :

"This young man is not only guilty of sacrilege, but he is also disloyal ; he has no regard either for the gods or for the laws of the Empire."

Then, calling one of the officers who were in attendance, he said to him :

"Is this Symphorian a citizen of this place?"

"He is not only a citizen of Autun," replied the officer, "but he belongs to one of the noblest families of the city.

"Oh, oh !" said the Judge, "now I understand the matter ; it is this which renders him so insolent."

"It was not my intention to be insolent" replied Symphorian ; "if I have offended you by my words, I beg your pardon."

"Well, then," said Heraclius, "I must suppose that it was through ignorance of the laws of the Empire, that thou hast spoken so disrespectfully of

the gods. A man of thy condition should not plead this as an excuse."

"I do not plead ignorance of the laws as an excuse," answered the youth, "but I am aware, that not even the Emperors have power to infringe upon the rights of my conscience. This is a matter that rests between ourselves and our Maker."

"We shall see about that," said the Judge, "when we come to understand one another better. Meanwhile let the law be read, so that all may clearly know its import."

Then one of the officers read the decree of the Emperor, as follows: The Emperor Marcus Aurelius, to all general officers and Governors: "Having understood, that in these our times certain individuals, who call themselves Christians, violate the enactments of our laws and statutes, We, therefore, command that they be seized, and subjected to various torments, unless indeed they be willing to offer sacrifice to our gods; in such a manner, however, that justice be kept within its proper bounds, and that, the evil being rooted out, vengeance may cease with the crime."

After the reading of the imperial edict, the Judge said to Symphorian:

"What sayest thou to that, Symphorian?"



Thinkest thou, that it is in my power to go against the will of our Sovereign so clearly expressed?"

"I would fain suppose," replied the youth, "that you know your own duty; as for myself, my Religion and my conscience teach me all the obligations wherewith as a faithful subject I am bound to comply."

"But thou canst not deny, that thou art accused of two great crimes: of sacrilege against the gods, and of want of due regard for the laws. Unless, therefore, thou art ready to give full satisfaction, I shall feel obliged to make an example of thee. The violated laws and the offended gods demand thy blood."

Symphorian answered:

"None shall ever convince me, that this image of what you call a goddess is anything more than the representation of the demon, who makes use of it to deceive men, and to drag them into everlasting misery. Every Christian that suffers himself to be misled by similar objects, and walks unguardedly in the paths which lead to crime, will undoubtedly fall into the abyss, and into the snares which the ancient enemy of mankind has laid for him. Our God, who rewards virtue with the utmost liberality, in like manner punishes sin with the greatest severity. He gives life to them who obey His

commands, and death to whomsoever rebels against Him. So long as I persevere faithfully in confessing His holy name, I am certain that, in spite of the tempest which the wicked one may arouse against me, I shall at last reach the haven of safety, where I shall enjoy the presence of the Eternal King."

When the Judge heard the words of the Martyr, and felt convinced that he was unable to overcome the constancy of the holy youth, he gave orders to his lictors to beat him with their rods. After Symphorian had undergone, with the greatest calmness, this punishment so disgraceful to a person of his condition, he was thrown into prison.

A few days afterwards, the noble Christian was again summoned before the tribunal of Heraclius. The sufferings which he had endured, now rendered him an object of compassion to all who beheld him. Worn out and emaciated, his youthful countenance, so changed from what it had been, bore witness to the harsh treatment he had received in prison. The Judge flattered himself, that this change in the outward appearance of the Martyr might have produced a similar effect upon his mind. Wherefore, assuming a look of great kindness, and with a voice apparently full of sympathy, he said to him :

"Consider, Symphorian, what thou lovest, and how great a wrong thou inflictest upon thyself, by

refusing to worship the immortal gods of the Empire; for, beside the glory which thou mightest acquire by serving in the imperial armies, thou couldst secure for thyself boundless wealth, which the generous Emperor would bestow upon thee. If thou do but worship Cybele, and offer incense to the great Apollo and Diana, wealth and glory—objects worthy of a nobleman's ambition—are placed in thy hands."

Symphorian made no reply. The Judge, thinking that he began to waver, added: "Well, then, Symphorian, let it be agreed. We shall now order the altars to be adorned with garlands, and the incense to be prepared for the sacrifice. Art thou satisfied?"

"I satisfied!" said the youth; "I think that a magistrate, to whom has been entrusted the care of the common weal, ought not to waste his time in frivolous talk. If it is dangerous not to make, every day, some progress in virtue, how much more dangerous is it to stray from the right path, and to expose one's self to the rocks of vice, which must inevitably cause our shipwreck?"

Unmoved by so noble a sentiment, Heraclius said: "If for no other reason, sacrifice to the gods for the sake of the honors which await thee at the palace of the Emperor."

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Struck with astonishment at so vile a proposal, the youthful Symphorian boldly addressed the magistrate: "A judge," he said, "debases his high position, and the majesty of the laws, when he uses the same to lay snares for the innocent. He draws upon his soul an irreparable loss, and exposes his own fair name to an everlasting disgrace. As for myself, I am not afraid to die, but I desire to lay down, for the sake of Christ, a life which, sooner or later, we all must give up as a debt of nature. It would be to me a source of tardy and useless regret, were I to tremble in the presence of a judge who is a mortal like myself. Your offers, presented to me as a honeyed cup, are in reality a deadly poison—woe to him that should be silly enough to accept them. Our riches are in Christ: neither time can corrupt them, nor can the changes of this world take them away; but the wealth which you offer—and which seems to be the object of all your desires—is empty and deceitful. The loss of earthly possessions causes us no grief, for we feel no affection for them: hence, fortune can never deprive us of anything which we value much, nor are we disappointed when it escapes from us. The God whom we adore can alone bestow abiding happiness. The remotest antiquity has not seen the beginning of His glory, because it precedes all ages; neither

shall the lapse of time behold the end thereof, because it is boundless and ever-enduring."

At these words of the Martyr, Heraclius grew angry, and said: "Thou weariest my patience, Symphorian, with thy talk about the greatness and splendor of that Christ of thine. In short, either offer forthwith sacrifice to the great mother of the gods, or, after having made thee endure the most horrible torments, I myself will lay thy head as an offering at her feet."

"I fear no one," replied Symphorian, "save the Omnipotent Creator, who gave me life and being—Him alone I adore. You have my body in your power, but my soul you have not. However, it appears to me, a person of your understanding ought to see, how disgraceful to men is the worship which you offer to your idols. If you consider, with the eyes of virtue and reason, the infamous gestures, the lewd and disgusting ceremonies of the worshippers, can you call this an act of religion? Who does not blush at the thought of a god, like your Apollo, driven ignominiously out of heaven, and becoming a shepherd of Admetus? Oh, what a god! Of what virtue, capable of ennobling human nature, is he the pattern? And his oracles, whereby you suffer yourselves to be deceived, what are they? You know well enough, that the voice

of the demons, which speaks to you from the tripod, misleads you, and that you must twist its ambiguity to suit yourself, so as to give it the appearance of truth. And what is your Diana, except the noon-day devil, who scouring through the streets and highways, sows the seeds of envy and discord in the hearts of deluded mortals?"

This bold language of the noble youth excited the Judge to so violent a passion, that he interrupted Symphorian, and immediately pronounced against him the following sentence: "We solemnly declare Symphorian guilty of high treason against the laws, both human and divine, because he has refused to sacrifice to the gods, has spoken of them with disrespect, and has, by words and actions, shown contempt for the sacred altars. Wherefore, let the avenging sword forthwith take off his head, that thus satisfaction may be given to the gods and to the laws."

Whilst he was led to the place of execution, his aged mother drew near to the Martyr, and said to him: "My son, my beloved Symphorian, lift up thy heart to the living God. Be of good cheer. We need not fear a death which infalliably leads to life. Raise thy heart to Him, who reigns in the heavens above. This day, thou dost not lose thy life, but thou exchangeest it for one of endless bliss. O, my



son, this day will see the beginning of thy true and imperishable life."

The blessed Martyr answered with a look of affectionate thankfulness, the pious exhortation of his generous mother. Fearless in death, even as he had been in life, he fought the good fight to bear witness to the power and truth of the Faith, which had been his hope and consolation from the days of his childhood. The sword of the executioner soon severed the head from his body, and his spirit soared into the presence of the immortal King, to receive the reward promised to the valiant soldiers of Christ.

According to custom, some of the Faithful secured the precious remains of the youthful hero of the Cross, and piously deposited them in a cave, near which flowed the quiet waters of a rivulet. But the secret abode of the relics of the servant of God did not long remain concealed. His place of sepulture was made glorious by so many miracles, that the Pagans themselves soon came in crowds, confessing the power of the God of the Christians, and imploring the intercession of the blessed Symphorian, the youthful Martyr of Autun. About the middle of the fifth century, Euphronius, afterwards Bishop of Autun, erected a magnificent church, under the invocation of our Martyr.



## VII.

ST. LUCY.

A THRONG of pious pilgrims were gathered around the solitary grotto, where rested, "deposited in peace," the sacred remains of the Virgin Martyr St. Agatha, the patroness of Catana, in Sicily. Syracuse, the ancient metropolis of the island, had sent forth her numerous worshippers, and gloried in doing honor to one, who had rendered the Christian name illustrious by her heroism in the midst of the most cruel torments.

Among the Faithful thus assembled was a noble Syracusan lady, Eutychia by name, who, at the suggestion of her daughter, had come to obtain from God, even at the Martyr's tomb, that health of body which human skill had been unable to restore. Clad in the weeds of widowhood, and leaning for support upon the arms of her daughter, Eutychia bent her weary steps to the humble resting-place of

the servant of God. The sacred Mysteries were being celebrated, the deacon, turning to the people, read from the Gospel as follows:

“There was a certain woman having an issue of blood twelve years, who had bestowed all her substance on physicians, and could not be healed by any.

“She came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment; and immediately the issue of her blood stopped . . . . And Jesus said: Somebody hath touched Me; for I know that virtue is gone out from Me.

“And the woman, seeing that she was not hid, came trembling, and fell down before His feet, and declared before all the people for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was immediately healed.

“But He said to her: Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go thy way in peace.” (Luke viii.)

The two pilgrims felt strengthened in hope, when they heard this marvelous story.

“Mother,” said the daughter, “those words of the Gospel are doubtless addressed also to you. The blessed Agatha, who stands at this moment in the presence of Him for whose sake she laid down

her life, will surely make intercession for you. Have faith, and you shall be healed."

They both knelt down at the tomb of the Virgin Martyr. Eutychia poured forth her whole soul in fervent supplication, begging, that, if it was the will of God, she might be freed, through the merits of the glorious Saint, from her long and distressing ailment, even as the woman had been healed by the mere touch of the Saviour's garment. Her prayer was continued for a long time. Meanwhile, a feeling, as it were of a sweet slumber, seized upon the senses of Lucia, as she was kneeling by the side of her mother. She beheld the blessed Agatha, surrounded with a halo of brightness, approaching her with a heavenly smile, and heard her say: "Lucia, my beloved sister, why dost thou ask me that which thou canst thyself at once grant to thy mother? for, behold, thy faith has come to her relief, and she is healed. But know, that as the Lord Jesus Christ has glorified through me the city of Catana, so He will through thee, render Syracuse illustrious; because, by thy virginity, thou hast prepared for Him a pleasant dwelling in thy heart."

The maiden awoke from her extasy, and cried out: "O, mother, mother, thou art healed!"

Eutychia found that the petition had been granted.

Her supplications were changed into gladsome hymns of thankfulness; and all the multitude rejoiced, because God had added new glory to the patron Saint of Catàna.

In the meantime, the veil of mystery had been removed from the eyes of Lucia; she saw into the very depths of her heart. The voice of Agatha kept sounding in her ear; her thoughts were illumined with a new light,—the will of her heavenly Bridegroom was clearly known to her. “Can it be,” she said to herself, “that He, whose delight it is to dwell with the children of men, hath chosen my heart to make His abode therein! Oh! the joy it gives me to think that I shall be wholly His. No earthly love shall, henceforth, lay claim to that which my Lord hath selected to be His own forever!”

And the Virgin burst into tears as the vision of heavenly delights, and of earthly trials, passed in turn before her mind.

Eutychia wondered as she beheld the excited state of feelings which had taken possession of her daughter. But Lucia said to her:

“O, my mother, my beloved mother, I know how much you take to heart my real happiness. I know the views you entertain concerning my settlement in life; but I must tell you, that I have chosen for my-

self One, to whom I have given my heart,—a Bridegroom, whose beauty and nobility far surpass the greatness and splendor of all here below. Wherefore, in the name of the holy Martyr, whose prayers have restored you to health, I entreat you, think not of giving me to another suitor, but permit me to use my dower in the service of Jesus Christ, my sole Lord and Master.”

“My daughter,” replied Eutychia; “it is now nine years since death deprived you of a father; from that time, I have not only faithfully watched over the patrimony of the family, but I have carefully labored to increase its vast extent. You know that whatsoever I have is yours. Why, then, would you hasten to take possession of a fortune which you can one day enjoy with full liberty? Wait until the last sleep has closed my eyes, and then dispose of all as you think best.” But Lucia answered:

“Listen to me, mother. Is it a sufficient token of our love for God—is it doing for him all we can, when we offer to Him that which we are no longer able to enjoy? During life we may call our possessions our own; but what do we take along with us when we are borne to the tomb? Would you wait to bestow your alms upon our suffering Lord, till comes the time when you have no longer any use

for your riches? In the name of Him who lived and died poor for our sake, suffer me to gladden the hearts of His children, the poor, and thus fulfil the duty which I owe to them."

The mother was silent, but gave her consent.

From that day, Lucia began to bestow the most liberal alms upon the needy and afflicted. The more she gave away, the richer she grew in spiritual wealth; the more closely she felt herself drawn to the Heart of her celestial Bridegroom. And withal she continued to lower herself in her own eyes, deeming herself unworthy of being one day seated at the mystical banquet of the nuptials of the Lamb. Yet what could she do? She had sacrificed all worldly hopes upon the altar of virginity; she was breaking asunder the last ties that bound her to the things of earth; her heart had become a sanctuary whence incessantly arose the sweet incense of charity, as a pleasing offering to the Beloved of her soul. What else was wanting? Ah! the Heart of Him to whom she had devoted herself demanded a holocaust. Lucia understood this, and she longed for Martyrdom.

From the time when the Blessed Agatha had enkindled in the generous soul of Lucia the sacred flame of love, which was at last to consume her, the youthful Virgin constantly repeated the prayer

which her sister addressed to her Lord, as she was expiring in the midst of her torments: "Sweetest Jesus, who didst from my infancy close my heart against the love of perishable things, receive and possess this heart, which is Thine forever. Accept my body and soul as an offering wholly consecrated to Thee. To suffer for Thee is my greatest delight, to be separated from Thee my greatest torment. Let my exile have at last an end; open to me Thy everlasting dwelling!"

Her prayer was heard, but her path through life was thenceforth to be strewn with thorns.

The young nobleman, who had expected her hand in marriage, soon became aware that his hopes were to be disappointed. He learned, with the utmost vexation, that Lucia was daily selling some of her jewels and part of her estate, and distributing the price among the poor. His real or pretended affection forsook his bosom, the spirit of revenge entered his heart. Knowing that it was the Religion she professed which prompted her to perform these deeds of charity, he resolved at once upon the course he would pursue. The persecution of Diocletian against the Christians was raging at the time with the greatest fury. Forthwith, he presents himself before Paschasius, Governor of Syracuse, and

accuses the Lady Lucia as being a Christian, and an enemy of the gods of the Empire.

Paschasius, anxious to display his zeal in seconding the views of his imperial master, immediately gave orders, that the youthful Christian should be arrested and brought before him. Although the modesty of the Virgin was startled at the suddenness of this order, yet, knowing that her heavenly Bridegroom would change her weakness into strength, when the glory of His name was to be manifested before men, she courageously and cheerfully obeyed the summons. When Lucia stood in the presence of the Governor, he said to her: "If thou wouldst save thy life, worship our gods."

"I do not worship demons," answered Lucia.

"Then offer sacrifice to the guardian spirits of Rome."

"I know but one sacrifice pure and full of honor, which I can offer, this is 'to visit orphans and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.' During three years, I have daily offered this sacrifice to my God and Father; and now I long for the happiness of offering myself to Him as a living victim. His holy will be done!"

"That is all nonsense," said Paschasius; "Thou

mayest talk such stuff to Christians ; but for us, who respect and keep the ordinances of the divine Emperors, such vagaries are altogether without meaning."

"You keep the laws of your sovereign," replied the fearless maiden ; "I keep the laws of my God. You fear Cæsar, I fear the one true God, whom I serve. You are desirous of pleasing men, I desire to please Jesus Christ alone. If you do what you seem to think best, do you pretend to deprive me of the right of acting according to the dictates of my reason and conscience?"

Instead of acknowledging the wisdom of these answers, the Governor became greatly incensed, and said to her :

"I cannot but admire thy boldness and impudence ; yet, what else could we expect from one that, at so early an age, has managed to squander her patrimony in luxury and foolishness, like the most shameless of women?"

"As to my patrimony," replied Lucia, "I can assure you, that I have taken care to lay it up in a safe place ; but as to those who use their wealth to corrupt the souls of men, I am not of them, nor did I ever associate with them?"

"And who, pray, are those corrupters of the souls of men?"

“You are one of them ; it is against such men as yourself that the Apostle puts us on our guard, when he says : ‘ Evil communications corrupt good morals.’ You strive to lead us away from our Lord and Maker, to make us run after vain idols and to bring us to the worship of demons. You would induce us to prefer a transitory pleasure to virtue, which is permanent ; you would make us love the deceitful joys of time, instead of the boundless delights of eternity ; therefore, you are truly a corrupter of souls.”

At these words of Lucia, the countenance of Paschasius turned pale with rage. Ashamed, however, of being put to silence by a mere child, he attempted to frighten her by threats. He said to her :

“ I presume that all this talk of thine will have an end, when we come to blows.”

“ To the servants of God,” replied the maiden, “ words shall not be wanting, for Christ our Lord hath said : ‘ When they shall deliver you up to magistrates and powers, take no thought how or what to speak : for it shall be given you in that hour what to speak. For it is not you that speak ; but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.’ ”

“ Hast thou then in thee the Holy Spirit ? ” asked the Governor.

“They that lead a chaste and holy life,” answered Lucia, “are the temple of the Holy Spirit.”

“Now I know the means of silencing thee. I shall have thee taken to a place of lewdness, and then the Holy Spirit will no longer dwell in thee.”

“If you order me to suffer violence against my will and consent, I shall not only not lose my chastity, but I shall secure for myself a double crown.”

Thereupon, Paschasius, unable any longer to contain his fury, commanded her to be taken away, according as he had threatened. His attendants instantly seized her. But He in whom she had put her trust, the divine Protector of Virgins, did not forsake her. He endowed her with a supernatural strength. In vain did the fierce executioners endeavor to drag her away. Lucia stood firm and immovable as a rock. Every effort to shake her was unavailing.

Witnessing this miracle, but unmoved by the evident interposition of God, the Governor ordered a fire of pitch, resin, oil, and other inflammable materials to be made around the heroic maiden; but the flames left her untouched. As she was standing in the midst of the flames, Lucia said: “Did I not tell you, that chaste souls are the

temple of the living God, and that His Holy Spirit dwells therein? When the love of Jesus is kindled in the heart, the flames wherewith you surround me are a pleasant coolness and a refreshing dew."

At these words Paschasius gave orders to one of his soldiers to pierce her body with his sword. On receiving the wound, the noble Martyr fell down on her knees, then raising her voice she said: "I announce to you a great joy. Diocletian descends from his throne, Maximian dies, the Church breathes again: peace extends its protecting wing over the martyred Saints. O Syracuse, O place of my birth, as Catania finds its safety and glory beneath the guardianship of my sister Agatha, so shalt thou be shielded by me, if thou art willing to embrace that Faith, for the truth of which I shed my blood."

Meanwhile a priest, hearing that one of the Christians was suffering for the Faith, hastened to the place of execution, and approaching the dying Martyr, administered to her the holy Viaticum. Lucia, her countenance beaming with joy at this unexpected favor, crossed her hands before her breast; then, bowing down her head, expired in the embrace of the beloved Bridegroom of her soul.

Thus died this heroic maiden, whom neither youth, nor beauty, nor wealth, nor aught of what the world can give, could charm away from the

love of Him to whom her heart was devoted, and who, in return, now took her to His own divine Heart, amid the joyous acclamations of all the Saints and Angels.

Her festival is kept by the Church on the thirteenth of December.





## VIII.

SS. PERPETUA AND FELICITAS, WITH THEIR COMPANIONS.

IN every age God has chosen to make known the power of His grace by examples of superhuman fortitude, shown forth in the conduct of His Saints. Hence we may learn, that it is not the effect of our own exertions, nor of our determined will, which makes us conquerors; but that the supernatural help, which is granted from above, must ever be acknowledged as the real source of our strength. "To those who love God all things work together unto good," says the Apostle; and "the sufferings of this life are not worthy of the glory to come, which shall be revealed in us." These two considerations have produced the wonders of Christian heroism among all classes of society. And where shall we find a more striking illustration of their influence on the hearts of men, than in the Martyrdom of SS. Perpetua and Felicitas?

The cruel persecution, begun in 202 by the Emperor Severus, did not extend to Africa until the following year; but, when it reached that Province, it raged with the greatest violence. Among the first that were arrested for the faith, were five Catechumens: Revocatus, Saturninus, Secundulus, Felicitas and Vivia Perpetua. Perpetua was twenty-two years of age, and married to a person of high rank. Her parents were still living; her father was a pagan. One of her two brothers was also a catechumen. She was naturally of an affectionate and timid disposition, in delicate health; and, what added still more to her distressful situation, she had an infant son whom she herself was nursing. She had received a liberal education, suited to a lady of her condition; in short, she possessed every worldly advantage which Roman society, as it was at the time, deemed quite enviable. But Perpetua did not centre her affections in the things of earth: her aspirations were far nobler. To bear witness to the truth was her highest ambition, and, weak as she knew herself to be, she felt persuaded that strength would not be wanting in the hour of trial. The account which she herself has written of her own sufferings, as well as of those of her companions, recalls some of the most interesting pages of Church history,

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For some days previous to their trial, the Martyrs were kept under a strong guard in a private house. The report of their arrest created considerable excitement throughout the city of Carthage. The father of Perpetua, who loved her more than all his other children, was no less surprised than grieved at this misfortune which had befallen his family. He hastened immediately to the prison, and began to expostulate with her in terms of the most loving affection. He showed her how disgraceful it appeared to him, that a lady of her rank should suffer herself to be treated as a common evil-doer, when a simple word would be sufficient to set her free. Perpetua remained deaf to all his suggestions and entreaties. At last, pointing to an earthen vase, which stood close by, she said :

“ Father, can that earthen vase change its name ? ”

“ No, I think not,” he replied.

“ Neither can I,” said Perpetua. “ I cannot call myself by any other name, than the one wherein I glory, that of a Christian.

“ At these words,” says Perpetua in her narrative, “ my father, quite beside himself with anger, threw himself upon me with such violence, that it seemed as if he was about to pluck out my eyes. But he restrained himself, and was satisfied with beating me. After this outburst of passion, he withdrew in



great confusion, because he saw that, with all the arguments which the demon had suggested to him, he had been unable to shake my constancy. I returned thanks to God for this first victory, and now enjoyed some moments of rest; because I hoped that, after my father's disappointment, he would leave me free from further annoyance.

"During this interval of peace, I, together with my companions, received holy Baptism. As I was cleansed in the regenerating waters, the Holy Ghost inspired me with the desire of asking for no other grace, except that of constant patience amidst bodily sufferings.

"Some days later, we were taken to the common prison. I was frightened at the sight of the place, for never had I imagined so horrible a darkness. Oh! how long that first day appeared to me! oh! how oppressive the heat! Here we were packed together so closely, that we were almost unable to stir. And besides, the soldiers, who were sent to guard us, tormented us by their insolent behavior. Then the thought of my infant son, not knowing what had become of him, added the keenest pang to all I had to endure.

"However, Tertius and Pomponius, two deacons, moved by the spirit of charity, were not slow in giving us assistance; by offering liberal bribes to

our jailers, they succeeded in obtaining for us the pleasing boon of being allowed to spend, daily, a few hours in a part of the prison where we were less confined, and where a freer circulation of air enabled us to refresh ourselves. Here every one seemed to forget his past hardships. To my unspeakable joy, my infant was now brought to me, so that I was able to nurse him myself; the poor child was well nigh worn out with hunger. All my anxiety was concerning him. Yet, when my mother and my brother came to visit me, I did not fail to console and even encourage them; but, above all, I recommended to them my helpless babe. Undoubtedly, I was deeply moved at seeing those whom I loved so much, so greatly distressed on my account. These feelings of mine afflicted me sorely for many days; but when, at last, I had obtained permission that my babe should be left with me, I felt so much relieved that I almost forgot every other care: consolation seemed to overwhelm me, my dungeon appeared a magnificent palace: I would not willingly have exchanged my prison for the most inviting abode.

“ One day, my brother came to visit me, and said: ‘ My sister, I know that you are a special favorite of heaven, ask therefore of God, that He would deign to make known to you, either by a vision or in any

other manner, whether you are to suffer death, or whether you are to be restored to freedom ?

“ Being aware that I had frequently held familiar communion with my God, and that I had often received tokens of His infinite goodness toward me, I replied with great confidence : ‘ When you return to-morrow, I will let you know.’ ”

“ Wherefore, I besought our Lord to grant me this favor ; and, during the night, I beheld the following vision :

“ I saw a golden ladder of so marvellous a height, that it reached from the earth to heaven ; but it was so narrow, that only one person at a time could go up by it. Both sides of the ladder were bristling with all sorts of iron instruments, swords, lances, scythes, daggers ; so that any one, who should climb up carelessly, and without constantly looking up to the top, could not fail to be cut and torn to pieces by the sharp instruments. At the foot of the ladder lay a dragon of enormous size, ready to terrify and assail those who should try to ascend. Saturus, who was not with us when we were arrested, but who had, of his own accord, given himself up, that he might cheer us on in our troubles, was the first to go up. When he had reached the top of the ladder, he turned to me and said : ‘ Perpetua, I wait for thee ; but beware lest that dragon bite

thee.' I replied: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ he shall not hurt me.' Then the monster, as if afraid of me, slowly lifted up its head, and I drawing nigh, placed my foot upon it. When I reached the top of the ladder, I found myself in an immense garden. In the garden I saw a tall man, clad in the garb of a shepherd; his long flowing hair was white as snow. He was seated in the midst of his flocks, and was milking them; around him stood a countless multitude of persons, all robed in white garments. He raised his head, looked at me, and said: 'Thou art welcome, my child.' He beckoned me with his hand to come near, and then gave me a morsel, as it were of curds; I joined my hands, and reverently eat the food: and all they that stood around answered in a loud voice: 'Amen.' At the sound of the voice, I awoke, and perceived that I had been eating something exceedingly sweet.

"When my brother returned in the morning, I related to him what I had seen. And, when the vision had been made known to my companions, we all concluded that it was God's will that we should suffer Martyrdom. From that moment we gave up all thoughts of the things of this world, and we began to direct all our hopes and desires to the things of eternity.

“A few days afterwards, a rumor was spread that we were to be examined. On hearing this, my father hastened again to the prison. I saw at once the deep sorrow depicted on his countenance; he looked pale and emaciated with anxiety. He came to me and said:

“‘My daughter, have pity on my gray hairs; have pity on thy father, if I still deserve to be called by that name. If thou still rememberest, that with these hands I have brought thee up to this the flower of thy age; if I have cherished thee more fondly than any of my other children, do not make me a laughing-stock to men. Look upon thy brothers, look upon thy mother and thy aunt; have compassion on thy darling babe, that cannot survive thee. Lay aside that haughtiness and foolish courage, before thou bring us all to ruin. Shouldst thou perish by the hand of the executioner, which of us shall therefore be able to lift up his head?’

“Thus spoke my father, and taking my hands, he kissed them; he threw himself at my feet, and shedding a flood of tears, he called me no longer his daughter, but his lady. A great sadness overpowered my soul at this moving scene, which was much increased when I reflected, that my father was the only person in the family who would not rejoice at my Martyrdom. I endeavored to console him,

and said: 'My father, grieve not; nothing will befall me upon the scaffold, save what is pleasing to God. Remember that we are all in God's power, not in our own.' Then my father, without uttering a word, went away, weeping as if his heart would break.

"The following day, whilst we were taking our meal, some officers suddenly presented themselves, and summoned us to appear before the judge. We repaired to the forum. The report of our trial had already been spread throughout the city; a vast concourse of people of every rank filled the tribunal. One after another we were ordered to mount an elevated platform, whereon was seated Hilarian, the Procurator of the Province. Every one of my companions, when interrogated, generously confessed the Faith. It was now my turn; I was ready to make, without fear or trepidation, the same firm confession of my Faith, when behold, I see my father standing before me with my infant in his arms. He draws me a little aside, and, in a tone of gentlest supplication, he addresses me:

"'O my daughter, have pity on thy innocent babe!' Hilarian, the judge, seeing the entreating looks of my father, immediately joins in: 'Spare the gray hairs of thy father,' says he, 'have pity on

—~~and then~~—  
this little infant. Sacrifice for the prosperity of the Emperors !’

“ ‘I will not do it,’ I reply.

“ ‘Art thou then a Christian ?’ asks Hilarian.

“ ‘Yes, I am a Christian,’ I answer.

“The boldness with which I made this confession, seemed to embarrass the magistrate. Meanwhile, my father did not cease by words and looks to urge me to comply with the command of the judge. But Hilarian, recovering himself, and seeing that all endeavors of persuading me would end in disappointment, ordered one of the officers to send away my father. This officer, in order to enforce compliance with his command, was so bold as to strike my father with his stick. This blow afflicted me more than all I had hitherto endured. I knew how sensibly the disgracefulness of such an act would affect my aged parent, who had never failed to resent the least insult offered to any member of his family. Wherefore, I grieved much more for my father’s sake than I would have done, had I myself been publicly beaten with rods.

“After this, Hilarian pronounced our sentence, whereby we were all condemned to be exposed to the wild beasts. Our condemnation filled us with the greatest joy, and we returned cheerfully to our prison.

“So soon as we were again in our place of confinement, I requested the deacon Pomponius to go for my little son. My father was unwilling to give him up. He assured me, however, not to be uneasy on account of the child; for he seemed not to feel the loss of his nurse, but willingly took other food, without apparently noticing the change. I thanked God, who, in His goodness, relieved me thus from my greatest anxiety.

“Thenceforward, we continued to spend all our time in prayer and thanksgiving. One day, as we were thus engaged, it happened, as it were by chance, that I uttered the name of Dinocrates. It seemed to me altogether strange, that I should remember him at such a time. I had not thought of him for many a day. I shed tears at the remembrance of the sad accident which had snatched him away. I felt within me an interior whispering, which assured me that I should be heard, were I to pray for him. Wherefore, I began with great fervor to beseech our Lord for him. The following night I had this vision:—I saw Dinocrates coming out of a very dark place, in which I beheld also many other persons. His complexion was very pale, his face covered with perspiration; his lips seemed parched with a burning fever; he still retained in his cheek the ulcer of which he died, at

the age of seven years. This Dinocrates was my brother; it was for him I had prayed so fervently. Between him and me there was a great distance, so that it was impossible for us to come near one another. Close to him stood a large vessel filled with water, but the brim was so high that the child could not reach it. He attempted again and again to do so, but always in vain. I felt very sad for my brother, when I saw him making so many useless efforts. When I awoke, I clearly understood that Dinocrates was in great suffering. At the same time, I was firmly persuaded that my prayers would afford him relief. Therefore, I prayed for him, with many tears, both night and day, asking our Lord to grant me my request.

“As we were condemned to be exposed to the wild beasts during the public games, which were given in honor of the new Cæsar Geta, we were removed from the prison in the city to one situated in the suburbs, near the amphitheatre. Here we were placed in the stocks. During this time, my mind being still constantly occupied with the sad state wherein I had seen my brother Dinocrates, I was favored with another vision: I beheld the place, which was so dark and cheerless when I saw it the first time, now charming and filled with light. Dinocrates himself appeared clean, well clad, his

countenance full of joy; on his cheek, instead of the frightful cancer, I saw merely a scar. The large water vessel was now not higher than his waist; and he drew out the water, of which he drank without any trouble. Upon the border stood a large golden cup filled with water, of which he drank repeatedly, and the water did not diminish. After thus refreshing himself, he would go about amusing himself with play, after the manner of children. When I awoke, I became at once satisfied that he was now free from his pain."

[The conclusion which St. Perpetua draws from these two visions, is another instance of the belief of the Church, in the earliest times, that some sins are expiated after death by sufferings, and that the prayers of the Faithful are of the greatest advantage to the departed. This child, belonging to a family almost wholly Christians, had doubtless been baptized; but before dying, as the great doctor, St. Augustine, observes, may have committed some faults, either by being led into some act of superstition by his pagan father, or by telling untruths,—faults of which children, even at that tender age, may render themselves guilty.]

"Pudens, the officer in command of the guards of the prison wherein we were now confined, treated us with the greatest respect. He saw that God

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favored us with many supernatural gifts. He frequently recommended himself to our prayers, and did not refrain from manifesting feelings of sincerest commiseration. Wherefore, he permitted many of the brethren to visit us; and thus we had the consolation of constantly encouraging one another.

“As the day of the public shows was now near at hand, my father also took occasion to visit me again. The sight of him affected me exceedingly. I had no words that could afford him the least comfort. He seemed wholly given up to despair. He tore his beard, threw himself on the ground; he cursed the day that had seen him born. None could have witnessed so harrowing a spectacle without shedding tears of sympathy. What could I do? I wept for him: I offered to God my own sufferings, beseeching Him to enable my loving parent to bear up with this overwhelming misery.

“On the eve of our struggle, I was favored with another vision. The deacon Pomponius came to the gate of our prison; he knocked very hard; I went to open the door for him. He was clad with a rich garment of the purest white, it was bordered with a countless number of pomegranates of gold. He said to me: ‘Perpetua, we are waiting for thee; art thou not willing to come? Come with me.’ He took me by the hand, and led me through a

very rough and narrow path. After making several turns, I felt so fatigued, that I could with difficulty draw my breath. At last we arrived at the amphitheatre, he conducted me into the middle of the arena, then, turning to me, he said : ‘ Perpetua, fear not, I am with thee, I share thy struggles ;’ saying this he left me. Looking around me, I beheld an immense multitude of persons, all gazing at me with the utmost astonishment. As I remembered that I was condemned to be exposed to the wild beasts, I could not understand why they were not let loose against me. Whilst I stood thus wondering, I suddenly saw an individual, to all appearances an Egyptian, disgustful to look upon ; he advanced toward me ; he was followed by several attendants, all as ill-shapen as himself. The Egyptian presented himself before me in the attitude of a combatant, ready to begin the fight. At the same moment, I beheld several young men, of comely aspect and of great bodily strength, coming toward me ; they smiled when they saw that my countenance exhibited some signs of alarm. They changed my garments, and at once I found that I had become a fearless and vigorous athlete. They anointed me with oil, as is the custom when champions are being prepared for the combat. Meanwhile, the Egyptian was rolling himself in the



sand of the arena. We were just at the point of beginning the struggle, when there came towards us a man of so prodigious a stature that he reached to the very top of the amphitheatre. He wore a rich purple tunic without a girdle, two golden clasps inlaid with precious stones were hanging in front. In one hand he held a wand, like that which the master of the gladiators uses ; in the other he had a green branch on which hung golden apples. Having ordered silence, he said : ‘ If this Egyptian conquer her, he shall slay her with his sword ; if she overcome him, she shall receive this branch and the golden apples.’

“ Then he withdrew. Thereupon, I grappled the Egyptian : he struck me with his fist. He made every effort to seize my foot, hoping that thus he might overthrow me ; I redoubled my blows upon his face. It seemed to me as if I were lifted off the ground, but I smote my antagonist all the more vigorously. Thus we struggled for a long time. I grew weary, when I perceived that the issue of the combat remained so long doubtful. I joined my hands closely together, and summoning up all my strength, I struck my opponent full on the head. The blow made him stagger ; he fell powerless with his face upon the ground. In an instant I had placed my foot upon his head so as to crush it.

Loud acclamations from the people rent the air; my companions sang a hymn of triumph. I went up to the person who appeared as the master of the games; he received me with a smile of delight, he gave me the promised prize, and, affectionately embracing me, said: 'Peace be with thee, my daughter.' And whilst the accents of joy still resounded all around, I proceeded toward the gate called Laura-Vivaria. At this moment, my vision vanished. I understood that the combat in the amphitheatre was to be not so much against the wild beasts as with the devil. But, at the same time, I was cheered on by the assurance that victory would crown my struggle. These things I have written to leave a record of what befell us, before we were exposed to the wild beasts. Should any one choose to write what occurred on that day itself, let him do so."

Thus ends the narrative given us by St. Perpetua.

When we consider the peculiar hardships which attended her arrest and imprisonment, we cannot help admiring the courage and greatness of soul which she displayed. But God, for whose love she suffered, supported her, at the same time, with no ordinary graces. For, when all that the world holds dear, youth, rank, family, wealth, seemed to draw her away from the attainment of that object in

which all her happiness was centred, the vision of future blissfulness, and its never ending duration enabled her to spurn all the short-lived allurements of fleeting time, and to devote herself wholly to securing that jewel of unutterable price,—life everlasting,—adorned with the Martyr's crown. "He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than Me," said the Saviour, "is not worthy of Me." It was the return of love to be made to the loving Heart of Jesus, that overruled every other feeling in the affectionate heart of Perpetua; it was the grandeur of this love that makes her stand before us, noble and majestic, amidst the greatest trials that can befall the servants of God. Happy we, if we are willing, in our own troubles of life, to learn from her example.

Nor did God fail to bestow upon the companions of Perpetua similar favors, in order to comfort them in their sufferings.

The blessed Saturus, also, has left us the record of a vision, the narration of which cheered the hearts of his companions.

"Our struggle in the amphitheatre was over," he says, "we had left our bodies. Suddenly I beheld four Angels, who seemed to lift us up, yet without touching us. We advanced towards the East. Our ascent was not straight upwards but gradual,

as if we were going up the gentle slope of a hill. When in our progress we had lost sight of the earth, we saw ourselves surrounded with a most dazzling light ; I said to Perpetua, who was beside me : ‘ This is the promise of the Lord, we are even now seeing its fulfilment.’ And as the four Angels bore us onward, we found ourselves soon in a delightful place of boundless extent ; it had the appearance of a garden. It was filled with every kind of trees in full bloom, and with roses of all colors. The trees were as high as the cypress ; a gentle breeze shook the branches, and countless flowers dropped off unceasingly, covering the ground with every variety of colors. In the garden, we beheld four other Angels, brighter still than the four who accompanied us. When they saw us approaching, they advanced towards us ; received us with every mark of honor, and, with an expression of admiration, they said to the other Angels : ‘ Behold, here they are at last.’ The Angels who had borne us up, seemed filled with wonder, and now placed us upon the ground. We immediately began to walk about through this paradise of delights. We had not gone far before we met Jucundus, Saturninus and Artaxius, who had all been burned alive in the same persecution ; and Quintus, who had died a Martyr in prison.

We asked them, where we should find the other Martyrs who were of our acquaintances ; but the Angels said to us : ‘ Come first, enter, and pay your respects to the Master of this place.’

“ We followed the directions which they gave us, and, all at once, saw before us a place of indescribable splendor : the hangings covering the walls surpassed in gorgeousness the brightest fancies of the imagination ; the walls themselves seemed made up of rays of light. Before the entrance stood four Angels, who clothed us with snow-white robes. When thus arrayed, we entered a vast hall glittering with light, and heard the united chorus of a great multitude singing without ceasing : ‘ Holy, holy, holy.’ And in the middle of the place we beheld, seated on a throne, a person of ravishing beauty, his long flowing locks exceeding white, his countenance youthful ; his feet we could not see. At his right and at his left were standing twenty-four Ancients, and behind them very many others. We advanced, seized with an ecstasy of wonder, and stood before the throne ; the four Angels lifted us up, and he that was seated on the throne embraced us, and gently stroked our face with his hand. And the Ancients said to us : ‘ Let us halt.’ And we stood, and gave to one another the kiss of peace. Then the Ancients said to us : “ Go now, and amuse

yourselves according to your pleasure.' Whereupon, I said to Perpetua: 'Thou hast now whatsoever thou didst long for.' And she replied: 'Thanks be to God! As I was ever joyous and cheerful whilst in the body, I am infinitely more so at present.'

"As we were going out, we found, before the gate on the right hand, our Bishop Optatus, and on the left, the priest and doctor Aspasius; both appeared very sorrowful and kept at a distance from one another. Seeing us near them, they cast themselves at our feet, and said to us: 'Settle the difficulty which exists between us, for ye have gone forth and have left us in this state.' We said to them: 'Art not thou our father, and thou a priest? Why would ye thus humble yourselves before us? It belongs to us to prostrate ourselves before you.' And we threw ourselves down before them; after which we embraced them with great tenderness. Then Perpetua began to converse with them, we led them into the garden, and stopped beneath a large rose-bush. Whilst we were there discoursing, Angels came and said to Optatus and Aspasius: 'Suffer these to recreate themselves, and if ye have any dispute between you, kindly forgive one another.' Then, requesting them to separate, they said to Optatus: 'Correct thy people; they attend

thy meetings as if they were just returning from the circus, so much are they given to disputations.' And it seemed to us as if they were going to shut the gates against them. Meanwhile, we recognized many of the brethren, as well as Martyrs. We all inhaled the fragrance of a delicious perfume, which satisfied us so completely that we felt no craving for any other food. Here I awoke, filled with an ineffable joy."—Such was the vision of Saturus.

Secundulus, one of their companions, who was anxious to share with them the struggle in the arena, died in prison, exhausted by the hardships which they had to endure. Felicitas, being pregnant, was very uneasy lest the laws of the Empire would hinder her from suffering Martyrdom with the rest. But, by their united prayers, they obtained from God that this source of anxiety on her part should be removed. She was prematurely delivered of a daughter, whom a Christian lady adopted as her own child. When the pangs of childbirth seized Felicitas, the intensity of the pain made her cry out. One of the guards said to her: "If thou canst not endure these sufferings without crying out, how wilt thou behave when thrown to the wild beasts—which, however, thou couldst have avoided by sacrificing to the gods of the Empire?" "Now it is myself who suffer these pains," replied

Felicitas, "but then there will be with me, One who will suffer for me, because I will suffer for Him."

Meanwhile, the tribune, who had the Martyrs in his keeping, treated them very harshly. Some meddling persons—whether through ill-will, or because in their silly credulity they believed it true—had worked on his feelings of superstitious fear, by assuring him, that the Christians under his care would free themselves from their prison, before the day of the public shows. Although he did not deem this possible or even probable, yet, since like other ignorant Pagans, he believed that Christians possessed magical powers, he determined that it should be no fault of his, if they made their escape. Wherefore, he not only redoubled his watchfulness over them, but stinted them in the food, which was allowed to those who were condemned to fight the wild beasts, and annoyed them in every manner whereby he imagined to keep them more perfectly under his control.

Perpetua, however, who was not unaware of what the laws granted to persons in their situation, was unwilling that her companions should endure privations, which were rather a consequence of the cruelty of their keepers, than of the severity of their judges. She boldly addressed the tribune: "How darest thou deprive us of that relief which

the laws provide for us? Thou knowest the rank which we have ever held in society, and, besides, now we are under the special protection of Cæsar, forasmuch as we are to combat in the arena on a festival given in his honor. Ought it not rather to be thy boast, that we should appear on that day in a condition both creditable to thyself, and worthy of the great personage whose festive celebration we are to render glorious?"

The tribune blushed, and knew not what answer to make, when he received this rebuke. Anxious, to all appearances, that no blame should be attached to his conduct, he immediately gave orders that the Christian prisoners should be treated with greater kindness. He made known, besides, that their brethren should in nowise be hindered from visiting them, and that all other persons, in like manner, should be allowed to bring in refreshments, and to partake of them with the prisoners. Pudens, also, who had already been converted to the Faith, did them all the good offices in his power.

It was a custom to give a free banquet to persons who were condemned to fight in the arena. On the eve of their struggle, the Martyrs saw the prison crowded with a multitude of people, chiefly Pagans, some of whom seemed desirous of showing kindness to the Christians, of whose virtues they had



heard so much; others appeared to have come merely to gratify an idle curiosity, and to learn, by actual observation, what sort of champions the following day would present in the amphitheatre. The Martyrs willingly underwent this humiliation—for such it was to them in reality—for the sake of Christ. They did not neglect, however, to improve the occasion, and to make this banquet a true feast of charity. They addressed their visitors with the freedom of the Gospel; they showed to them, that, unless they became converted, the wrath of God would ere long overtake them; that the innocent blood, which they shed, would cry to heaven for vengeance; and that, if they hardened their hearts, whilst the voice of mercy was calling upon them to return from their evil ways, endless regrets would not atone for their disregard of God's loving kindness. Saturus, especially, reproved them in the boldest terms: "Will not to-morrow satisfy your curiosity? Why would ye gaze at us now, apparently as friends, when on the morrow we shall be to you an object of scorn and hatred? To-day you seem to pity us, to-morrow you will clap your hands, when you see us murdered in the arena. Nevertheless, I would advise you to observe well our features, that you may know us again hereafter, when we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."

These words, uttered with that firmness of voice and countenance, which conscious innocence gave to the speaker, filled the hearers with dread and astonishment. Some of them withdrew, and strove forthwith to forget the impression which these awful truths had made on their minds ; but many others, moved by the grace of God that spoke to their hearts, remained with the Martyrs to learn from them the doctrine of salvation, and believed in Jesus Christ.

At last dawned the day for which the Martyrs had wished so long. The whole city of Carthage was in commotion. All were anxious to draw omens, favorable or unfavorable to the reign of the new Cæsar Geta, from the nature of the shows that were to be presented in the Amphitheatre. Superstition, which is ever the companion of irreligion, moved every heart in the pagan city. The future destinies of the Roman Empire seemed intimately connected with this first display of the young ruler's grandeur and magnificence. The people were to be impressed with the idea that their future Emperor was the favorite of fortune, or that his reign, if ever it became a reality, would only serve to hasten the downfall of that power which had for ages swayed the destiny of nations. Hence, from an apparently trifling cause, arose various

anticipations, according as the minds of the well-wishers of the Empire or those of its secret opponents were inclined.

These different feelings, as we may easily suppose, exercised not the least influence on those, about whose part, in the rejoicings of the day, the citizens of Carthage were seemingly so much concerned. The strength which had been granted them from above, the evident signs of heaven's approval, above all, the glorious cause for which they were to suffer, animated them with a cheerfulness which astonished the Pagans. As the Martyrs issued from their prison, all bore witness to the joy that was visible on their countenances, and the alacrity which animated their actions. If they showed any perceptible feeling, it was rather the anxiety of delight than that of fear. Perpetua came last of all: the calm resignation of her soul shone forth in every feature, her eyes modestly cast down told that, as the beloved of Christ, she held communion with her heavenly Bridegroom. The joy of Felicitas was increased by the thought, that, having so nearly been disappointed in her desire of dying for the Faith in the company of her noble fellow-sufferers, God had been especially favorable to her, by restoring her to health and vigor in an extraordinary manner.

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When they arrived at the gate of the amphitheatre, the officers, who had charge of the public games, gave orders that their garments should be taken from them, and that, according to custom, they should be dressed like the champions of the arena:—the men in the garb of the priests of Saturn, the women in that of the priestesses of Ceres. But they were firmly resolved not to yield to this custom, since, as Christians, they dreaded even the appearance of being in any manner connected with the worship of the Pagans. “We have willingly come hither,” they said, “that our freedom might suffer no interference. We gladly lay down our lives to avoid doing anything contrary to our holy Religion. Such is the agreement that exists between you and ourselves.” In this instance, injustice was forced to yield to justice: the tribune decided, that an exception should be made in their favor, and that they might appear in the amphitheatre dressed as they were.

Now that the struggle was so near at hand, they began to realize the true meaning of carrying the cross after Jesus. They found that His burden was light indeed; for Himself carried the heavier part. Their fortitude was far beyond the powers of nature; they themselves wondered at the miraculous workings of God's grace in their hearts. The vision of

Perpetua had, that very morning, been partly verified. The Shepherd of souls had visited them in prison: He had communicated to them His own strength, by becoming their supernatural food. The Martyrs had knelt before the priest of God, as he gave to them the holy Eucharist: "The Body of Christ," he said; "Amen," answered the assembled Faithful. That "Amen" was still ringing in the ears of Perpetua and was to her a joyful melody: she sang in spirit unto God a hymn of thanks, and, victorious by anticipation, she crushed the Egyptian beneath her feet.

Revocatus, Saturninus and Saturus, seeing the crowd of spectators, that were looking on from the galleries of the amphitheatre, said to them: "Ye are now looking down upon us, who have done no evil, as if we were wild beasts. Ye will clap your hands, when ye behold us in the agonies of death; but remember, that your triumph will be short-lived. The justice of an offended God will ere long overtake you; repent, therefore, and do penance for your sins." When arrived opposite the balcony where Hilarian was seated, surrounded by his numerous attendants, they were ordered to halt. Here their sentence was read again, whilst a dead silence reigned over the vast assembly. At the conclusion of the reading, Hilarian said to them:

“What say ye now against your sentence?” They replied: “Thou, Hilarian, judgest us in this world; forget not, however, that thou also shalt be judged in the next, by One who sees and knows all things.”

When the people heard this threat, they showed great indignation, and, hoping thereby to win the good graces of the Procurator, they cried out, that the Christians, who were so bold as to speak in that manner to the chief officer of the Province, should be scourged. Their desire was immediately granted. As the Martyrs were in the amphitheatre, this scourging was conducted according to the custom of that place. The *Venatores*, or hunters, armed with heavy whips, having balls of lead or of iron at the end, ranged themselves in two lines, and struck the poor victims with all their strength, as they passed before them. The Martyrs endured this cruel punishment without giving the least sign of flinching under the pain; although the sight of their torn and bleeding limbs was enough to move to pity even the hard-hearted spectators. They rather rejoiced the more, because this treatment rendered them, in some manner, similar to their suffering Redeemer.

Meanwhile, He who had said, “Ask, and ye shall receive,” was not unmindful of his heroic followers.

A few days before, whilst the Martyrs were conversing among themselves about the different torments to which the Christians were exposed, some expressed a preference of one kind of torture, if it were left to their choice, over another. Saturninus, animated with the true spirit of a Christian hero, said, that he would prefer to struggle with every one of the various beasts of the amphitheatre, that thus he might secure a more glorious crown. Revocatus had expressed himself to the same effect. They were not disappointed.

So soon as the two champions entered the arena, a leopard and a bear were let loose against them. The furious animals seized and mangled them with their teeth, until they left them apparently lifeless upon the platform of the amphitheatre.

Saturus had said, that he naturally felt more afraid of a bear than of any other animal and added, that he hoped a leopard would be set upon him to despatch him at once. When his turn came, he was ordered to advance into the arena. There he stood for some moments in anxious expectation, and commended his spirit into the hands of his Maker. Soon a wild boar of monstrous size is let loose against the Martyr. The beast looks at him, but is unwilling to advance. The spectators shout with impatience. The keeper of the animals feels em-

barrassed. The crowd continue their tumultuous cries and reproach him with cowardice, or with want of skill. Stung with vexation, the Venator applies the lash to the obstinate brute. The maddened boar turns round, and with his tusks rips open the body of the reckless hunter. The multitude are horror stricken. The animal, goaded on to rage by the excited mob, next seizes the Martyr, drags him through the arena, leaves him quivering on the ground, without having inflicted any serious injury, then returns quietly to his cage. The spectators are not satisfied; they demand, with great outcries, that Satorus be exposed to an enormous bear. The Martyr is near the den. The keepers use every effort to arouse the fury of the wild bear, but in vain; the animal refuses to stir. Thereupon, Satorus, sound and unhurt, is withdrawn from the arena, and reserved for a second trial.

It was now the turn of Perpetua and Felicitas. The demon had been overcome by the three champions who had first entered the arena; he seemed uneasy lest two persons of the weaker sex might in like manner defeat his purposes. He suggested, therefore, to them who presided over the public games, that these two Martyrs, contrary to the customs of the amphitheatre, should be exposed not to the wild beasts, but to the fury of a mad

cow. Wherefore, Perpetua and Felicitas, in spite of their earnest entreaties and supplications, are stripped of their garments, and put into nets. Thus prepared for the combat, they are introduced into the arena. Though mad with excitement, the people are filled with horror at seeing in so degraded and unbecoming a condition a young lady of high rank and refined education, and another who had but just recovered from a serious indisposition. They cry aloud, that they are unwilling to witness so cruel and disgusting a spectacle. Accordingly, the two Martyrs are taken back, and allowed to resume their garments.

After this momentary show of pity, the multitude shout again for the condemned Christians. Perpetua is immediately led back and exposed to the wild cow. Forthwith, the furious animal attacks her, tosses her up again and again in the air, until wearied with the cruel sport, she leaves the Martyr lying senseless on the ground. Soon, however, Perpetua comes to herself, and perceives that her garments are all torn and in disorder: forgetful of her sufferings, and ever mindful of Christian modesty, she arranges her dress, ties up her hair fallen loose in the struggle, and stands up erect, as if nothing had happened. Now, however, she beholds her companion, Felicitas, lying near her all

bruised and bleeding. She runs to her, helps her to rise, and encourages her with words full of cheerfulness. Then, taking each other by the hand, they stand together in the arena, waiting and prepared for whatsoever torture it will please the enemies of the Christian name to inflict. But the people who have been witnesses of the fierce and glorious struggle, seem ashamed of their own barbarous cruelty, and cry out, that it is enough. Wherefore, the Martyrs are led to the gate Sana-Vivaria, where it was the custom to put to death those who had escaped the fury of the wild beasts of the amphitheatre.

Here Perpetua was received by Rusticus, a catechumen, who had long been her attendant, and who was greatly attached to her. When she saw him, she seemed to awake, as it were from a deep sleep, but in reality from a long ecstasy. She looked around her, recognized several of her Christian friends, and, to the astonishment of all, inquired:

“When are we to be exposed to that wild cow?”

“God be praised, dear lady,” replied Rusticus, “that struggle is over.”

“Can it be possible!” said Perpetua; “what then has happened?” Rusticus related to her all the circumstances of the combat; but she could with

difficulty be made to believe that it was really so, until her attention was called to her torn garments, and to some slight bruises which she had received. Where, then, was the blessed Martyr during this fearful trial? Absorbed in the contemplation of the Majesty of Him, for whose sake she had entered the arena. He so overwhelmed her with interior consolations, that her weak and delicate body felt not the torments, the mere sight of which caused the spectators to shudder.

Then calling her brethren, and Rusticus, the catechumen, she said to them :

“ Persevere in the Faith, love one another, and be not scandalized at our sufferings.”

Meanwhile, Satorus—who, after the combat, had been taken to one of the porticoes of the amphitheatre—was engaged in earnest conversation with Pudens, the officer of the prison, who had shown so much kindness to the Martyrs, and who had received as a reward the precious gift of Faith. Satorus exhorted him to continue firm in the profession of his holy Religion, in spite of the trials, which he might have to endure, “ For,” said he, “ remember that, after all, the sufferings and the joys of the present life must soon have an end, whereas the recompense which awaits the faithful followers of the Cross, none can take away from us, but it abides

with us forever." He showed to him that death, in whatsoever form it might present itself, should have no fears for the true Christian, since it is the gate through which he enters into life. "And now," continued he, "remember what has happened to myself; I had prayed, that I might not be torn to pieces by the wild beasts. My prayer and my wish have been granted. See how good our God is to us. Trust, therefore, confidently in Him. I have also prayed, that when I am recalled into the arena, a leopard may despatch me with a single bite. This favor will likewise be granted; and I am now ready to receive the same."

The Martyr had hardly uttered these last words, when the signal was given that he should be led back into the arena.

When he stood again on the spot, where he had encountered the wild boar, a leopard was let out against him. The animal rushes, bounding upon Satorus, with one bite inflicts on him a ghastly wound, and suddenly retires. The Martyr stands covered with his own blood; the spectators are delighted, and cry out with shouts of derision:

"He is well baptized now, he is surely saved." This they said in derision of holy Baptism. Satorus, seeing Pudens who approached him, said:

"Farewell, my beloved friend; remember my

Faith; let not our sufferings cause thee any uneasiness. Let them rather be a source of encouragement to thee."

"Do not forget," replied Pudens, "when thou art in bliss, him whom thou hast led to the knowledge of Christ."

"Give me the ring which thou hast on thy finger," said the Martyr.

The officer gave him the ring. Saturus dipped it in his wound, and, returning it to Pudens said:

"Take the ring; wear it as a pledge of our lasting friendship. Let it remind thee of the blood which this day I shed for Christ, and of the interest I feel in thy perseverance and salvation."

When he had uttered these words, the Martyr expired. Thus was verified the prophetic vision of the blessed Perpetua, when she beheld Saturus at the top of the mysterious ladder, awaiting the coming of herself and her companions.

The people now began again to vociferate, demanding that the Martyrs, who had escaped the fury of the wild beasts, should be led into the middle of the arena. They arose immediately, and showed themselves ready to gratify the blood-thirsty eagerness of the multitude. According to the custom of the Christians, they gave one another the kiss of peace, and advanced boldly to the place of

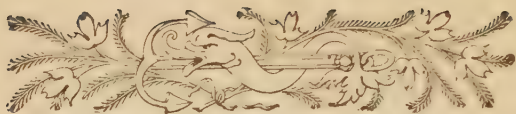


execution. Cheers and hootings greeted them from every side. "The sword, the sword," was the cry that rose above the deafening noise of the excited mob.

A body of gladiators soon made their appearance. The Martyrs knelt down. Revocatus, Saturninus and Felicitas received their death-stroke at once; with one blow their heads were severed from their bodies. Perpetua, however, fell into the hands of a young and unskilful apprentice of the gladiators. With trembling hand and unsteady aim, he inflicted several slight wounds. The people shouted enthusiastically as they witnessed this cruel butchering. The tumultuous uproar increased the confusion of the awkward executioner. In spite of her agonizing pains, the heroic lady remained calm and composed; with her own hand she directed the terrified gladiator where to strike. The fatal blow is given. Perpetua joins the glorious band of her martyred companions.

Their Martyrdom took place on the seventh of March, on which day their festival is kept by the Church.





## IX.

ST. PONIUS.

THE persecution against the Church, under the Emperor Decius, raged with so fearful a violence, that many of the Faithful began to believe that the last days of tribulation, foretold in the Scriptures, had arrived. The peace enjoyed during the reign of the preceding Emperor, whilst it had contributed to the spreading of the Gospel, had also produced a great relaxation in the morals of the people. The love of earthly possessions had by degrees crept into the hearts of men who, whilom, had centred all their affections on the good things of eternity. With the love of wealth came vanity, pride and luxury, and a forgetfulness of the most important duties of Christianity. The reign of the blood-thirsty Decius burst upon them like a sweeping tornado; all the Provinces of the Empire were shaken by its irresistible might. Great was the

consternation of the Faithful, but greater still their grief, when they beheld many,—even those who had hitherto been pillars in the House of God,—at first shaken, soon afterwards crushed by the fierceness of the storm. But the glory of the intrepid champions of the truth shone most brightly, when all around seemed wrapt in deepest gloom.

The ancient see of Smyrna, rendered illustrious by the virtues of the great Polycarp, was now shrouded in mourning. Endemon, its chief Pastor, had fallen away from the Faith. The name of Christian had become a by-word of reproach. Each day beheld some of the faint-hearted among the brethren going into the temples of the idols, and offering incense as a token of their apostasy. The Faithful wept in silence over the abomination of desolation seen in their midst. The hymns of joy and triumph were hushed in the places of worship; because there were none to give testimony to the truth. The day, however, that was to cheer again the Christian heart, was not far off. A champion of the Faith appeared in the person of Pionius.

On the vigil of the birthday of the blessed Martyr Polycarp, this holy Priest was spending the night in fasting, watching and praying. Suddenly, he was rapt in spirit, and, in a vision, he saw that

God had chosen him, together with Sabina and Asclepiades, to glorify His name before men. The heart of the servant of God leaped for joy at the thought, that he was deemed worthy of so glorious a sacrifice.

Forthwith he went to communicate the happy tidings to his companions. Great was their delight. Animated with a holy zeal, and eager to show their readiness to suffer for the sake of Christ, they caused three heavy chains to be made. These they put around their necks; so that they who should come to arrest them might find them prepared to be led to prison. Meanwhile, they continued their prayer until morning, when they took some sanctified bread and water.

They had not waited long, when Polemon, one of the keepers of the temple, entered their dwelling. He was attended by a band of soldiers, and a great crowd of people, brought together by the report, that some of the Christians were to be seized. When Polemon saw Pionius and his companions, he said to them :

“Do you know that an order has been issued by the Emperor, commanding you to offer sacrifice to the gods?”

“We know that there is a commandment of God,

whereby we are ordered to offer sacrifices to Him alone," answered Pionius.

"Follow me then to the forum," said Polemon; "there you can learn that I am speaking the truth; there, too, you shall be taught obedience."

Upon this, Asclepiades and Sabina said in a loud voice: "We obey the one true, living God."

As they were led out of the house, the people were astonished to see them in chains. This excited their curiosity to such a degree, that an immense multitude began to follow the prisoners through the streets. Pionius had foreseen this when he put on the chains, rightly concluding that the sight would, in some sort, repair the scandal given by those who, of their own accord, had gone to offer incense to the idols.

When they reached the forum, the throng was so immense, that it was with much difficulty they could advance as far as the Eastern porch. For, being a Sabbath day, the Jews, of whom great numbers dwelt in Smyrna, being at leisure, were especially anxious to witness this trial of the Christians. In consequence, even the roofs of the houses and of the temples were filled with eager spectators of every age and condition.

The Martyrs, seeing themselves surrounded by this vast multitude, inwardly returned thanks to

God, who gave them so favorable an opportunity of glorifying His name in the sight of men. Polemon, having ordered silence, addressed the prisoners :

“It were better for you to comply at once, like so many others, with the orders of the Emperor, and thus escape the tortures which are prepared for you.”

But Pionius, waving his hand to draw the attention of the people, and raising his voice, said to them :

“Ye men of Smyrna, who glory in the strength of the walls and the beauty of your city, and who deem it an honor to claim the poet Homer as your fellow-citizen ; and ye among you who are of the Jewish nation, listen to me. I understand, that you are wont to receive with sneers and laughter those Christians who, of their own accord, go to offer incense to your gods, and those who make but a feeble resistance when they are compelled by others so to do ; because you consider the first light-minded and foolish, and the second destitute of manly courage. But you should remember, that Homer, your master and instructor, calls it wicked to speak evil of the dead, or to enter into conflict with those that are no more. And you, Jews, should give heed to your great Lawgiver, when he says : ‘ If thou see the beast of burden of thy

brother fallen down in the way, thou shalt not slight it, but shall lift it up with him.' And does not Solomon, the wisest of your kings, warn you: 'When thine enemy shall fall, be not glad, and let not thy heart rejoice in his ruin?' As for myself, I would rather undergo every suffering, and die a thousand deaths, than set aside the principles which I have learned from my Master, and which I have also taught. Why then, I ask, do the Jews so cruelly insult not only those who offer sacrifice, but also ourselves? Why do they say, that we deserve not to breathe the air of heaven? Were we even their enemies, they should still look upon us as men. What wrong have we done to them? What sufferings have we inflicted upon them? Did we ever persecute them? Did we ever force them to worship idols? They, assuredly, should show themselves more merciful than all others towards those whom the fear of men causes to fall away."

In this manner the holy Martyr continued to address the people at great length, blending the language of Christian charity with wholesome instruction. All listened to him in deep silence, and with the greatest attention. When, at the end of his discourse, he raised his voice and exclaimed: "We adore not your gods, nor do we worship your golden statues, wherein we see no value,—ex-

cept such as the material of which they are made, or the skill of the artist has given them:" the vast assembly, overcome by his boldness, seemed unable to give expression to the different feelings by which they were agitated.

Soon, however, Polemon gave orders that the prisoners should be removed from the portico, where they had at first stood, and led into the open court-yard. Here several officers drew near to them, and Polemon began, in their presence, to exhort Pionius to yield obedience to the Emperor's edict:

"Thy modesty and uprightness," said he, "have won our esteem and affection; sad indeed would it be for us to be obliged to use extreme measures against thee, whom we deem so worthy to live. Reflect, how pleasant it is to enjoy the blessing of life, and to behold the light."

"I confess," replied Pionius, "that life is sweet and light is pleasing; but I speak of that life and that light, for which we are longing. We do not undervalue any of God's gifts; but we forego the blessings of the present, for the sake of securing those of the hereafter,—which are immeasurably greater. I thank you for the good-will you seem to have for me, although I must suspect its sincerity; open hatred is preferable to wily flattery."

Then a certain Alexander, one of those idlers, who in all countries are seen loitering in public places, desirous of distinguishing himself before the crowd, said to the servant of God :

“Listen, O Pionius, to what I have to say to thee.”

“Nay, on the contrary,” answered Pionius, “listen thou rather to me ; for I know all thou hast to say, but of the things which I know, thou art wholly ignorant.”

This he said, remembering that it is written, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he imagine himself to be wise.”

Alexander, however, appeared not to be satisfied with the rebuke which his forwardness had received, but, with a sneer, he said again :

“Tell me, Pionius, what is the meaning of those chains around your necks?”

“That now is a proper question,” replied Pionius. “These chains signify that it is useless to attempt to drag us before the altars of your idols, in the hope that we may be induced to offer sacrifice to them.—At the sight of these chains, the whole city may bear witness, that we will not, of our own accord, enter your temples ; and that there is no need of troubling us with a public interrogatory to discover our firm resolve, since we are fully prepared to go

to prison, or whithersoever the violence of our enemies may think fit to lead us."

These answers of the holy Priest produced a sensible effect on the minds of the people. Many of them began to sympathize with the innocent prisoners. Others, when they saw their cheerful disposition, murmured against the severity of the imperial edict; and the muttered voice of "cruel policy and imperial tyranny," became audible among the vast multitude. Alexander, thinking this a fair chance of gaining the favor of the magistrates, and, at the same time, the good-will of the people, again addressed the prisoners:

"I think, if you were willing to take a right view of the matter, it would be beneficial to yourselves, as well as to your friends, to yield to present circumstances; hereafter, changes may occur, then means may be employed to avert every danger."

"The present is our own," said Pionius; "for its use we are accountable. If we cause our own ruin at this time, the future will not save us. Besides, what would it profit us to do as you desire? Would you not in your heart look upon us as cowards, who are boastful when there is no danger, but forsake the standard, under which they have enlisted, so soon as they come in sight of the enemy? No, no; men of Smyrna, a brave soldier does not avoid

the present conflict, in the hope of gaining an easy victory at some other time; nor is he ashamed of the just cause which he has deliberately embraced."

"Must we then conclude," said Alexander, "that you are unwilling to change your mind?"

"Take it for granted," answered Pionius, "that it is our firm resolve to persevere in our Faith: never will we abandon the truth to espouse the cause of error."

"If ye are so determined," replied Alexander, "what use is there of wasting words? If, when life is offered to your choice, ye prefer death, the fault is your own."

"Far better is it to die with honor," said Pionius, "than to live in disgrace."

The people, who had become interested in the fate of the prisoners, now began to demand that they should be taken to the place where the public shows were usually exhibited; so that all might have a chance of hearing the words of the brave champion of the Christians. Some of the principal men of the city, however, entreated Polemon not to heed this request: for they perceived that great excitement and disaffection prevailed among the assembled multitude. Besides, it was customary among the inhabitants of Smyrna, to take advantage of similar occasions to stir up the spirit of revolt,

and so force their rulers to comply with whatever requests they chose to make. Polemon was greatly perplexed when he considered all this, and would gladly have adopted some measures to disperse the crowd; but he saw that the means he possessed would prove powerless against the will of the people. Wherefore, he resolved to continue the interrogatory in the place where they were at present, in the hope of afterwards finding an opportunity of removing the prisoners to some other locality, less exposed to the intrusion of the public.

The people, meanwhile, began to show their impatience by loud and tumultuous cries, which were by no means calculated to restore confidence to the uneasy mind of Polemon. Hoping, therefore, to divert their attention, he began once more to address the Confessor of the Faith:

"Tell me, Pionius," he said, "art thou really resolved not to offer sacrifice to our gods?"

"I am resolved," replied Pionius; "and it is a wonder to me that, seeing the circumstances wherein you have placed me, you can be so shameless as to annoy me with so foolish a proposal."

"Nevertheless," said Polemon, "in spite of thy unwillingness to offer sacrifice, thou canst have no objection to enter our temples."

“Even if I considered it an indifferent matter to enter your temples,” said the Martyr, “it would be of no advantage to them, nor to your gods.”

“Must I then understand thee to mean, that it is of no use to attempt to convince thee,” added Polemon, “and that thy mind is open to no persuasion whatsoever?”

“Far be it from me,” answered Pionius, “that I should be opposed to persuasion; would to God that I could persuade you all to become Christians.”

When he said this, there arose a considerable excitement among the people, who were eagerly listening to every word that was spoken. After a while, some of them cried out:

“Be careful, good man; do not try to make any attempt of the kind; thou mightst easily expose us to be burned alive.”

“It will be much worse for you, my friends,” replied Pionius, “to be burned forever after your death.”

Whilst this discussion was going on, some of the crowd, observing that Sabina, one of the companions of the holy Priest, could not help smiling at what was said, cried out to her with a threatening look:

“Dost thou dare to laugh?”

“I smile,” answered Sabina, “since God wills it

so, for we are Christians; as such we have a good reason to be ever joyful."

"Thou shalt full soon undergo certain torments which will leave thee little inclination to rejoice," they said; "because it is our custom to throw those who refuse to offer sacrifice into dens of infamy."

"The God of holiness will have care of me," replied Sabina, "so I need not fear your threats, how cruel soever they may appear."

Polemon, who felt ill at ease, because he had undertaken to arrest these Christians on his own responsibility, during the absence of the Proconsul, was now at a loss how to proceed. After consulting with some of his friends, he again addressed Pionius:

"Prepare thyself to obey us without any further delay, or thou shalt learn to thy cost that we have power to enforce our commands."

"If it is your intention, either to make us obey, or to show your power by punishing us," replied Pionius, "take it for granted, that you will have to resort to the latter expedient, for to make us obey is not in your power."

This answer took Polemon by surprise. He would gladly have made a pointed reply, but he was afraid of compromising his assumed authority.

After waiting for a few moments, he said again to the Confessor :

“Go, sacrifice to the gods.”

“Never,” said Pionius.

“Why not?” asked Polemon.

“Because I am a Christian,” answered he.

“What God dost thou adore?”

“The Almighty God, who hath made the heavens and the earth, and all things therein contained, whom we know through His Word Christ Jesus.”

Then Polemon, addressing him with more kindness, said : “Thou mightst at least sacrifice to the Emperor?”

“I will offer sacrifice to no man,” replied the Martyr.

Polemon now became fully aware that he had to deal with a person of no ordinary courage and intelligence. For fear, therefore, of compromising himself, he resolved, by the advice of his friends, to carry on the examination of the Martyrs in a legal form. He appointed a Notary to make a record of the questions put, and of the answers given, after which he said to the Confessor :

“What is thy name?”

“Pionius,” answered the Martyr.

“Art thou a Christian?”

"Most certainly, I am a Christian!"

"I understand," said Polemon, "that, among Christians, there are several Churches; of what Church art thou?"

"Of the Catholic Church," replied Pionius, "for with Christ there is none other!"

Polemon then turned to Sabina. This servant of God had already endured great sufferings for the sake of her Religion. For, under the reign of Gordianus, her mistress, who was a pagan, had vainly endeavored to make her apostatize from the Faith; when at last she became convinced that all her efforts would prove useless, she had her put in chains and banished to the mountains, there to perish by want and exposure. The brethren, however, coming to the assistance of the poor sufferer, released her. On her return to Smyrna, Pionius advised her to change the name of Sabina, for that of Theodota, lest her former mistress might claim her again. When, therefore, the officers asked her name, she replied at once:

"My name is Theodota, a Christian!"

"If thou art a Christian," said Polemon, "of what Church art thou?"

"Of the Catholic Church," she replied.

"What God dost thou adore?"

"The God who created heaven and earth, and all

things;—whom we know through Jesus Christ, His Word.”

“After this he addressed Asclepiades: “And what is thy name and profession?”

“Asclepiades, a Christian,” answered the Confessor.

“Of what Church art thou?”

“Of the Catholic Church.”

“What God dost thou worship?”

“Jesus Christ.”

“Is that another God?” said Polemon, with some astonishment.

“Not at all,” replied Asclepiades; “He is the same God the others have confessed!”

They were now led to prison. So great was the crowd that it was hardly possible to move through the forum. As the Martyrs passed along, they became the subject of all sorts of remarks from the people.

“Look at that man,” said some, pointing to Pionius, “who was heretofore so pale and weak, how strong and healthy he now appears!”

Sabina, whose modesty and patient sufferings should have awakened feelings of respect and sympathy, was, on the contrary, the special object of the vulgar jests of the brutalized multitude. They called even upon Polemon himself, using threats



against him, if he did not punish the prisoners, in case they were unwilling to obey. He, however, assured the mob, that he was willing to do everything in his power, but that the final sentence depended on the judgment of the Proconsul.

Asclepiades,—who was of small stature, and could with difficulty follow as they were hurried on,—was all the more exposed to the laughter of the crowd. One of them cried out :

“I’ll lay a wager, that little man is going to offer sacrifice to the gods.”

“Thou speakest false,” replied Pionius, who heard the remark, “he will do nothing of the kind !”

“Yet, this one and that other have sacrificed,” some said, “why should not you ?”

“Every one to his taste,” answered the Martyr. “What is that to me ? My name is Pionius ; I am responsible for myself alone !”

“But thou, who art a man of learning,” said another, “how canst thou run to destruction through thy obstinacy ?”

“What thou callest my destruction is the very thing that encourages me to persevere. Remember how, not long ago, ye all suffered from hunger, pestilence, and every other calamity. Of what profit has it been ?”

“Thou, too, didst suffer with us,” cried several.



“Yes, truly,” replied Pionius, “but I suffered with hope in God.”

This answer so incensed the crowd, that they were ready to rush upon the bold champions of the truth, and tear them to pieces. The archers, however, who acted as a guard, succeeded in keeping them at a distance, until the three were safely lodged in prison. Here they met several persons, who had also been arrested on account of their Religion, among others a Catholic priest called Lemnus, and a woman called Macedonia. They were all confined in the same apartment. Many of the Faithful soon made their appearance, bringing refreshments and various sorts of presents. Pionius thanked them for this kindness, but was unwilling to receive any of the things that were offered. “Although I have often lived in want of the necessities of life,” said he, “yet I have never been a burden to any one; why should I now become a cause of trouble to you in order to feed on delicacies?”

This refusal did by no means satisfy the greediness of his keepers; for, as they were accustomed to appropriate to themselves most of the presents thus offered, they naturally concluded, that the self-denial of the servant of God would prove a great loss to themselves. Through a spirit of revenge,

therefore, they cast Pionius, and his two companions, into a dark and filthy dungeon, where none should have access to them. When they entered this gloomy abode, the Martyr exclaimed: "Praise and thanks be to God!" Then addressing the jailers, he added: "Now, my good friends, you are welcome to whatsoever gifts may be brought for us."

On hearing this, the keeper of the prison stood astonished, and begged them to return to their former apartment. But Pionius said: "By no means, let us stay where we are. Praise be to God! here we shall be able to pray and to meditate night and day, without fear of being interrupted."

The Pagans, however, now came in great numbers to visit them, in the hope of inducing them at last to sacrifice to the gods. They soon perceived that all their efforts would prove useless. Some, likewise, of them that had yielded to the violence of the persecution, and had fallen away from the Faith, presented themselves before the generous Confessors. Many of these had formerly led a blameless life: now they felt all the agony of despair. With many tears, they entreated the faithful sufferers to make intercession for them. At the sight of these wretched beings, Pionius also burst into tears, and said:

"A new and hitherto unknown torture is now

added to all my sufferings. Alas! I behold the precious pearls of the Church cast before swine. I see the stars of heaven that were dragged to the ground by the infernal dragon. O, my beloved children, how I am racked and torn with the pangs of travail, until, by a new birth, I restore you again unto Christ. Return, O return again to the fold from which you have strayed. Great is your sin, but greater is the goodness of your Father in heaven. His arms are stretched out, ready to embrace you. The Heart of your Saviour longs to forget your past transgressions, if you are willing to come to Him; for His mercies endure forever. Why will you seek death, when life everlasting is offered to your repentance?"

By these and similar words did the holy Martyr endeavor to move the poor apostates. Nor did he neglect to supply them with spiritual weapons, to overcome the attacks made by the enemies of Christianity; for he steadied the wavering, he raised the fallen, and cheered on the penitent. After this, he dismissed them with the hope of pardon, through the intercession of his prayers, and those of his fellow-sufferers.

Meanwhile, Polemon, the keeper of the temple, and Theophilus, the chief of the cavalry, accompanied by a large retinue of soldiers, and an

immense concourse of people, arrived at the prison. They ordered the Confessors of the Faith to appear before them, and said :

“Ye know that Endemon, your chief, has offered sacrifice : follow his example. Lepidus and Endemon himself will interrogate you in the temple.”

“They that have been thrown into prison are obliged to await the arrival of the Proconsul,” replied Pionius ; “how dare you take upon yourselves to perform his office ?”

When they heard this speech, and saw the determined look of the prisoners, they felt quite disappointed, and withdrew for the present to take counsel together. After a short time, Theophilus returned with his attendants, and artfully said to Pionius :

“We are sent by the Proconsul with orders to take you to Ephesus.”

“Let him, who is entrusted with this charge, come forward,” answered Pionius ; “we will accompany him without delay.”

“If thou refuse to obey,” said Theophilus, “thou shalt soon feel my power.” So saying, he threw a rope around the neck of the Martyr, and drew it so tightly as well nigh to choke him ; after which he ordered his attendants to conduct him and his companions to the forum. The prisoners cried out

with a loud voice, that they were Christians. They threw themselves on the ground for fear of being led into the temple of the idols. Six officers of the magistrate now made their appearance ; they seized Pionius, who resisted and struggled in vain. Lifting him from the ground, they placed him on their shoulders, and, amid the vociferations of the assembled multitude, carried him into the temple, and placed him right before the altar of the idol. The first person that met the eyes of the servant of God was the unhappy Endemon, who was still standing near the altar, where, with unhallowed hands, he had but now offered incense,—to the great scandal of the Faithful. A thrill of horror shook the frame of the venerable Martyr, at the sight of the sacrilegious wretch.

Lepidus, who was a judge, now addressed the prisoner :

“Why,” said he, “do you not sacrifice to the gods?”

“Because we are Christians,” answered Pionius, in the name of all.

“What God do ye worship?” added the judge.

“The God who made the heavens, and adorned them with countless stars ; who created the earth and beautified the same with flowers and trees ;

who set boundaries to the sea, and rules the seasons of the year."

"Speakest thou of Him that was crucified?" asked Lepidus.

"I speak of Him, whom God, His Father, sent for the salvation of the world," replied Pionius.

Thereupon, the judge and the officers who stood near, laughed exceedingly at what they considered the foolish vagaries of the Christians, and said one to another, so as to be heard by the Martyrs: "We must force these persons to do what we command."

Pionius immediately exclaimed: "Shame upon you! Can it be that ye profess to worship your gods, and have no regard for justice? Have ye no laws which ye are bound to obey? Do not these forbid you to offer violence to them that are unwilling to yield to your orders? Do they not command you to put such persons to death? Be yourselves obedient, at least to your own laws."

Then Rufinus, an orator, who enjoyed a high reputation in the city on account of his eloquence, said: "Leave off thy talk, Pionius; cease from seeking after vain glory with all thy reasonings."

"Is this thy eloquence, Rufinus?" replied the brave champion, "is this all the wisdom thy books have taught thee? Did not Socrates undergo a

similar treatment from the Athenians? Must we be imperfect and sluggards and cowards to obtain credit with men? Thinkest thou that Socrates, and Aristides, Anaxarchus and others like them, sought after vain glory, because they devoted themselves to wisdom and virtue?" This answer silenced the orator of Smyrna.

One of the Magistrates said: "Be not so anxious, Pionius, to make all thy noise heard by the people: thou shalt probably be quiet enough when comes the time of execution."

"Why, then," replied Pionius, "do you continue to offer us violence to no purpose? Prepare the funeral pile; ye shall find that we dread not to encounter flames for the sake of Christ!"

A certain Terentius, one of the spectators, said to the Magistrates: "See ye not that this old man sustains, by his words and example, the obstinacy of the rest, and hinders them from complying with our demands? away with him."

Then, at a signal given by the Magistrates, some of the ministers of the temple advanced, and placed garlands of flowers upon the heads of the prisoners, as a token that they were about to offer sacrifice. But the bold champions at once snatched off the garlands, tore them to pieces and flung them indignantly away. A priest of the idols, who stood

by, holding the smoking morsels of a victim that had just been slain,—seeing that it was of no use to attempt to present them to these courageous men, began forthwith to eat them himself.

Not knowing what to do to overcome their determined resistance, the Magistrates ordered them back to prison. On their way, the mob loaded them with insults, using the vilest language to express their contempt of the Christians. One said to Sabina: “Couldst thou not stay, live and die in thy own country?”

“Where is my country?” replied Sabina, “I am the sister of Pionius: where he lives there I live, where he dies there I die.”

Another who was the keeper of the beasts of the amphitheatre, said to Asclepiades: “I will claim thee as one condemned to serve at the gladiatorial games.”

“That does not frighten me,” answered the Martyr; “one way of dying is, perhaps, as good as another for them that fear not death.”

As they were entering the prison, one of the officers struck Pionius on the head and wounded him severely. The Saint patiently endured this outrage, and made no reply; but the hand and the sides of the wicked wretch became immediately so swelled and inflamed, that his companions were

obliged to carry him off howling and suffering fearfully.

When the Confessors re-entered their dungeon, they threw themselves on their knees, giving thanks to God, who had enabled them to withstand manfully and perseveringly all the assaults of the enemy of salvation, and to triumph over the wily attempts of men—even in the presence of the scandalous Endemon.

Meanwhile Quintilian, the Proconsul, had returned to Smyrna. So soon as he heard what had been done against the Christians during his absence, he became very anxious personally to examine the accused. Wherefore, he summoned Pionius to appear before him. After asking his name, he said to the Martyr:

“What religion or sect followest thou?”

“I follow the Religion of the Catholics,” answered Pionius.

“Of what Catholics?” inquired the Proconsul.

“There is but one Religion of the kind;” replied the Martyr, “that of the Catholic Church, of which I am a Priest.”

“Art thou a teacher among them?”

“I have certainly taught among them.”

“I presume, thou taughtest them to be foolish and nonsensical,” said the Proconsul.

“By no means: I taught them to be pious and dutiful.”

“Pious and dutiful!” exclaimed Quintilian, “toward whom?”

Toward God, who made the heavens and the earth, and all things.”

“Now, then, offer incense to our gods.”

“I have learnt to adore the one only true and living God,” said Pionius, raising his eyes toward heaven.

“We worship all the gods, and the heavens, and all them who dwell therein; why dost thou look up toward the sky? Dost thou worship the sky?”

“I do not worship the sky, but Him who made the sky, and all things.”

“Who is He?” asked the Proconsul.

“It is of no use to tell you: I know too well that you would not condescend to listen to me.”

“Then thou must confess, that it is Jupiter who dwells in heaven, with all the other gods and goddesses. Wherefore, I command thee to offer sacrifice to that king of gods and men.”

Pionius was silent.

The Proconsul ordered him to be stretched upon the rack.

When they began to torture the Martyr, Quintilian said to him:

“Wilt thou sacrifice to the gods, or not?”

“Never,” answered Pionius.

“Whence this unavailing madness?” exclaimed the Proconsul.

“I am not mad, but I fear the living God,” replied the Martyr.

“Yet others have sacrificed, and now they enjoy life and happiness.”

“Nevertheless, I will not sacrifice to idols.”

“Bethink thyself; perhaps thou mayst still change thy mind.”

“Not at all.”

“It is great presumption on thy part, to be hurrying on to death in this manner.”

“It is not presumption on my part, but the fear of the eternal God, that directs my actions; besides, I do not seek death, but I long to enter into life.”

The Proconsul, seeing his constancy, could not but admire the fortitude of the Martyr. After consulting with his officers, he said again to Pionius:

“Resolve at last to sacrifice to the gods. If need be, I will allow thee more time for deliberation.”

“I do not need it. I am a Christian; I offer no sacrifice to idols.”

“Since thou art determined to brave death, thou shalt have it, but in no pleasant form.”

Thereupon, Quintilian ordered the officer to read, in Latin, from the tablets, the following sentence: “To avenge the gods of the Empire, and to impress men with a wholesome fear, we condemn Pionius, who confesses himself a Christian, and a Priest of the Catholic Church, to be burned alive.”

“Thanks be to God!” exclaimed Pionius.

Instead of remanding him to prison, the Proconsul directed that the sentence should be immediately executed. Wherefore, with a firm step and a cheerful countenance, the Martyr accompanied the executioners to the amphitheatre. When he arrived at the appointed place, he stripped himself of his garments, reserving only those which he deemed necessary in accordance with Christian modesty. Then, seeing the cross—to which, according to custom under similar circumstances, the condemned person was to be nailed—he placed himself upon it and stretched out his hands and feet. Whilst the nails were piercing them, the chief executioner said to the Martyr:

“Return at last to thy senses, O Pionius, and I will have the nails taken out.”

“I have felt them already: let them stick; praise be to God!” replied Pionius. Then pausing a while,

he said again, "I hasten unto thee, O Lord, that I may the sooner arise again."

Upon this the executioners raised the cross and dropped it into a hole; they heaped around it a pile of dry wood, and other inflammable materials, which they set on fire. The Martyr, with his eyes shut, remained absorbed in prayer. The crowd of spectators that stood watching him, seeing that he gave no signs of suffering, said: "He is already dead." But when the flames began to rise even above his head, Pionius opened his eyes, and, as if awakened from an ecstasy, smiled upon those that surrounded him, and said in a loud voice: "Amen. Receive Thou, O Lord, my spirit." He had fought a good fight, he had finished his course, he had kept the Faith.

When the flames had subsided, some of the Faithful drawing near to secure the precious remains of their valiant champion, found the body entire: the hair untouched, the beard unsinged, the face fresh and full of expression—as if life was not yet extinct. This sight wonderfully comforted the Christians, and strengthened them in their Faith.

The blessed Martyr suffered on the fifth of March, A. D. 250, whilst J. Proculus Quintilian was Proconsul of Asia.



## X.

ST. ACACIUS.

**W**HILST we admire the fervent zeal and unshaken fortitude of the heroes of Christianity, who laid down their lives for the Faith, we cannot withhold our meed of praise from the valiant champions, who encountered the frown of tyrants in defense of the truth. Martyrdom completes the triumph of the soldier of Christ. Public confession of the Faith—in the presence of the powers of earth, resolved to overthrow it—may, in some sort, be likened to a drawn battle, wherein the things of God, which appear foolish and weak, confound and bring to naught the wisdom and the strength of men. Hence many of the confessors of the Faith, who did not actually seal their confession with their blood, are honored with the title of Martyr; because, when standing before judges and rulers, they bore witness to the truth, prepared to shed their



blood for its sake. Thus they proved themselves not merely Martyrs in desire, but, by their bold championship, anticipated, and endured in spirit, the torments which, in all probability, were destined to close their struggle. Among these heroes the blessed Acacius, undoubtedly, occupies a prominent place.

He was Bishop of Antioch, in Pisidia. His great charity, which won for him the hearts of all men, his humble piety, his holy zeal and venerable age made him a shining mark for the enemies of Religion. Martian, the Governor of the Province, had no sooner learned that Decius had renewed the persecution against the Christians, than he resolved to gain the favor of his imperial master by an extraordinary display of ardor in furthering his plans—the extermination of Christianity. When at Antioch, his first care was to summon before him the holy old man. Acacius thanked God, who deigned to bestow upon him so great an honor; and forthwith presented himself before the Governor. The venerable appearance of the Saint made so strong an impression on the mind of Martian, that he seemed at a loss how to begin the interrogatory. Wherefore, setting aside the customary form of similar trials, he addressed the holy Bishop in words of seeming kindness.

"It seems to me, thou oughtest to entertain special feelings of love and reverence for our Emperors, since thou hast the happiness of living under the protection of the Roman laws, of which they are the faithful guardians."

"And who, among all the subjects of the Empire, show more regard for the person of the Emperor than we Christians?" replied Acacius. "Without intermission, we offer our prayers to God, that He may grant to the Emperor a long life and a prosperous reign; that He may endow him with the spirit of wisdom in his counsels, and of justice in his judgments; so that all the people committed to his care may enjoy peace and plenty and happiness, and yield him obedience with willing hearts."

"All this is very praiseworthy, indeed," said Martian, "but to convince the Emperor still more of thy fidelity, and of thy zeal to serve him, as well as of thy attachment to his sacred person, come now, let us go together and offer a sacrifice to him."

"I told you even now, that for the safety of the Emperor, I offer my vows and supplications to my God, who is the only great and true God. But the prince has no right whatever to demand that we should offer sacrifice to him. Sacrifice is due to God alone, and to no man; no matter how great and powerful he may be."

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“Tell me what God thou adorest, that we, too, may offer Him our prayers and sacrifices?”

“I wish with all my heart that you did know Him, but with a useful and saving knowledge.”

“Tell me, then, his name.”

“He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.”

“Are they whom thou mentionest also gods?”

“Not at all! they are the names of holy men, to whom the true God hath spoken. He is the only God; He alone must be adored, feared and loved.”

“But who, then, is this God? what is His name?”

“His name is the Most High Adonai, who sitteth on the Cherubim and Seraphim.”

“What meanest thou by Seraphim?”

“The Seraphim are ministering spirits of the Most High God; they are the principal lords of the heavenly court, who stand near the throne.”

“What vain discussions of philosophy have taught thee all these foolish absurdities? Put aside all these invisible things, and worship the true gods, whom thou canst both know and see.”

“And who are these gods whom you recommend me to adore?”

“There is, first of all, Apollo, the saviour of men, who preserves us from famine, from pestilence and

from other scourges; who illumines, rules and governs the world."

"Apollo, you say? what! that foolish fellow, who was captivated by the charms of a youthful beauty, and, like a madman, ran in pursuit of her, not foreseeing that this was to lead to his endless disappointment. It is plain enough from this, that he was no prophet, for otherwise he would have had a clearer idea of the fate that awaited him; neither could he be a god, since a timid maiden was able to deceive him. Nor was this the only trick which fickle fortune played him. For, as I have heard, and as you know very well, he loved a fair youth, Hyacinth by name, but he was so awkward,—though reputed the master of all things skilful,—that, with a quoit, he broke the head of his unfortunate favorite. Is he not the same god that became also a mason, and, with Neptune—another divinity like himself,—built for king Laomedon the walls of Troy? Is it not also said of him, that he was driven from heaven for some misconduct, and that, having no other means of gaining an honest livelihood, he hired himself to king Admetus to tend his sheep? Do you expect that I would offer sacrifices to such a deity?"

"But there are other gods, against whose worship thou canst have no reasonable objections."

“ Perhaps, you mean Esculapius, whom Jupiter struck with his thunderbolt ; or Venus, one of your goddesses celebrated for her infamous debaucheries. You cannot seriously hope to persuade me to offer sacrifice to such monsters of iniquity. No, no, even if I must lose my life by my refusal, I can never be led to worship your gods, whom I would blush to imitate in my conduct, and for whom I feel the utmost contempt and disgust. Nay, I dare say, if you were to give free expression to your reason and good sense, you would speak even as myself.”

“ As a Christian, thou art unable to give a fair opinion of our gods.”

“ That is a mistake. Tell me, if any subject of the Empire were to commit the crimes attributed to your gods, and if he were to justify himself by saying, that he had done so because he wished to be a faithful and practical imitator of your gods ; would you, through regard for them, acquit him of guilt, and let him go unpunished ? Why do you honor and worship that in your gods, which you punish with the utmost severity in men ?”

“ I know very well, that it is usual with Christians to heap all sorts of calumnies upon our gods ; wherefore, I command thee to come with me, this very moment, and offer sacrifice to the great Jupiter,



and the divine Juno; after which we will in their honor unite in a solemn banquet."

"How can I worship as god, a man whose tomb, it is well known, can still be seen in the Island of Crete? Tell me, is he risen from the dead?"

"All this talk is to no purpose; I can endure it no longer; make up thy mind either to sacrifice or to die."

"Now, that is an argument quite to the point," replied Acacius. "It is very much like the reasoning employed by the highwaymen of Dalmatia. These, it is said, station themselves in the narrow mountain-passes, and when some luckless traveler presents himself, they rush upon him with the unwelcome invitation: 'Either your money or your life.' No alternative is left, the poor man must give up the one or the other. In like manner, I must either give up my life, or render myself guilty of an act of impiety. But, I assure you, I fear nothing. The laws punish adulterers, thieves, murderers. Were I guilty of any of these crimes, I would be the first to condemn and punish myself, without awaiting your sentence. But if I am accused of no crime, except that of worshiping the true and living God, and if, on this account, I am to be put to death, I am not condemned by the law, but by the injustice of the Judge. One of our

prophets, who was also a king, exclaims: 'There is none that doeth good: all have gone aside, they are become worthless together: there is none that doeth good, no not one.' And in our Sacred Books it is written: 'With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged.' And again: 'As you would that men should do unto you, do you also unto them in like manner. Judge not, and you shall not be judged.' "

The Governor was not a little embarrassed by this boldness of speech; he felt inwardly convinced, that truth and sincerity animated the whole conduct of the aged Bishop. But what seemed to annoy him most, was, that Acacius, by his superior wisdom, as well as by the justice of his cause, had, in reality, become the accuser, instead of being the accused. Soon, however as a last resort, Martian betook himself to the maxim of tyrants: might is right. Wherefore, he said to Acacius:

"My orders are not to examine and judge these matters; but to make thee obey: if thou refusest to comply with my commands, I have torments at hand to inflict upon thee the proper punishment."

"And I also have my commands," answered the Saint, "with which I am resolved to comply, even at the hazard of my life; these are, not to deny my God, nor to disobey His holy law. If you think

yourself obliged to serve with fidelity a mortal man, who indeed possesses power to-day, but on the morrow shall be the food of worms, how great, think you, ought to be my fidelity and readiness in complying with the orders of the ever-living God, of whose power there is no end, and who hath beforehand pronounced this dreadful condemnation: 'He that shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven, when I shall come in glory and majesty to judge the living and the dead?' "

Martian, who had a high opinion of his own skill as a disputant, believing himself sufficiently acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity to prove them false and absurd, imagined that this last answer of Acacius had given him a fair opportunity of refuting the teaching of the Church. With an air of triumph, he said to the holy Confessor of the Faith:

"Thou didst just now utter an error of thy Religion, of which I have long desired to be informed. Thou sayest then that God hath a Son?"

"Doubtless He hath a Son," replied Acacius.

"And who is this Son of God?"

"The Word of grace and of truth."

"Is that His name?"

“You did not yet ask me about His name, but about His power.”

“Then I now ask thee, what is the name of the Son of God?”

“His name is Jesus Christ.”

“By what woman did God have this Son?”

“God did not engender His Son after the manner of men. Nay more, when God created the first man, he made his body of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Far from us be it, therefore, to imagine that God, who is a pure Spirit, is like mortal man, whom He created. But the Son of God, the Word of truth, is begotten by the intelligence of the Father, as it is expressed in our Sacred Writings: ‘My Heart hath sent forth a good Word.’”

“According to thy own avowal, God must then have a body,” said the Governor.

“Whence do you draw this inference?” asked Acacius. “He alone knows Himself. We cannot describe Him, because He is invisible to us, so long as we dwell in this mortal body. However, we know enough of Him, to adore, with humble submission, His infinite power and perfections.”

“But if God hath no body, as thou sayest, how

can He have a Heart or an intellect, since whatever has feeling must necessarily have a body?"

"Wisdom and intelligence can exist independently of an organized body. For spirit and matter have of themselves nothing in common with each other, but, if in man they exist together, it is because such was the omnipotent will of the Creator."

Martian now perceived that, by entering into a further philosophical discussion, he should most likely injure not only his own reputation, but furnish a new triumph to the venerable servant of God. Changing, therefore, his manner of attack, he endeavored to persuade Acacius to offer sacrifice, by alleging to him the example of others who had renounced the Faith.

"Behold," said he, "the Cataphrygians; they too were a people who professed an ancient religion like thy own, they have given up the errors to which they were so long addicted. Now they unite with us in offering sacrifice to our gods. If thou art wise, thou wilt not hesitate to follow their example. Go then, assemble together all the Christians of the Catholic Church, who are under thy care, induce them to go to the temples, and make them embrace the religion of the Emperor."

"The Christians of whom you speak," answered

the Bishop, "do not obey me, but God. When I teach them things which are just and reasonable, and not opposed to the divine law, they will undoubtedly listen to me with pleasure; but were I to attempt to pervert them, by exhorting them to do that which is contrary to God's precepts, they would not only disregard my words, but look upon me with pity and contempt."

"Give me then all their names, and I myself will attend to them," said the Governor.

"Their names are written in heaven, in the sacred registers of God. Do you think that a mortal eye can read the characters drawn by the immortal and invisible hand of God himself?"

"Where are the other great magicians, thy companions, those cunning teachers of the deceitful art practiced by the Christians?"

"We have faults enough wherewith to reproach ourselves in the sight of God, but none in this world abhor the art of magic more than we Christians."

"And what but magic and sorcery is this new Religion, which ye are introducing into the Empire?"

"Do you call that magic and sorcery which we frequently do with regard to your gods? I own that, not rarely, we overthrow them by a single word, and deprive them of that godship which you

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yourselves have given to them. But then those poor gods of yours are subject to very many infirmities, and liable to meet with sundry and unforeseen accidents; in fact, as you very well know yourself, were wood and stone to become scarce, most of them should never come into existence. With us it is far different. We do not fear a god made by ourselves; but we fear and love Him who made us. We adore Him as the Sovereign Lord and Master of all nature, who loves us, as a good father loves his children; who saves us from everlasting death and hell, as the careful and affectionate Shepherd of our souls."

The Governor, who could with difficulty control his excited feelings, was unwilling to acknowledge, that the last words of the aged Prelate had rendered it impossible to condemn him with any appearance of justice. After some moments of reflection, Martian assumed again a bold tone and said to Acacius:

"Give me the names which I ask, or take it for granted, that tortures will be my last argument to persuade thee."

"I am standing before your tribunal, and do you ask me my name? Dispose of me first. Or do you flatter yourself to be able to overcome, by your arguments, several of the ministers of the true God,

when you are no match for a simple, old man, like myself? But if you insist so much upon knowing our names, I am going to tell you all about them. I am commonly called Acacius, and if you want to know me still better, my proper name is Agathan-gelus. Piso, Bishop of Troy, is the name of one of my companions, here present; the other is called Menander, a Priest. You may now do with me as you please."

Upon this, Martian finished the interrogatory, saying :

"Thou shalt be kept in prison, until I receive an answer from the Emperor, to whom I shall send an exact report of whatever has this day passed between us."

An account of this interrogatory was, consequently, sent to the Emperor Decius. After having read it with considerable interest, cruel enemy of the Christians though he was, he could not help smiling, and said to his attendants :—"That old man did get rather the better of my Governor of Pisidia; it is my will, therefore, that he be restored to liberty, and allowed to worship his God, as he thinks proper. As for Martian, we make him also Governor of Pamphylia, hoping that he will find time enough to strengthen himself in the knowledge of dialectics."



The generous prisoner, after returning to his Church, continued for several years to labor in the vineyard of the divine Master, distinguished for his holiness and miracles, as well as for his learning and wisdom. His glorious confession is dated on the 29th of March. His memory is honored by the Church on the 31st of the same month.





## XI.

SS. LUCIAN AND MARCIAN.

THE grace of God, and His boundless mercy, must ever be foremost among the mysterious wonders which the Christian admires, and adores with humble thankfulness. All ages proclaim the marvellous workings of a kind Providence: the elect are gathered together from every clime and country, from every state and situation in life. Faith and obedience are the conditions proposed. If men are willing, and harden not their hearts, when they hear the voice of salvation, that which was despised becomes gloriously exalted; the deeds of wickedness are abandoned and changed into the merits of sanctity. What brighter illustration of this can we find than the conversion, the repentance and the martyrdom of SS. Lucian and Marcian?

They were Pagans, and Magicians by profession. Skilled as they were in their art, they employed

their knowledge in promoting the worship of demons, and in ruining the souls of men. Many were the victims whom they ensnared by giving them evil counsels, as well as by enabling them to gratify the vilest passions. Yet the light of truth, "which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world," at last dawned upon them in an unexpected manner.

There lived at that time in Nicomedia, where they practiced their vile art, a holy Christian virgin, who, from her earliest years, had consecrated herself wholly to God. Her rare beauty and personal accomplishments were only surpassed by the innocence of her life, and the fervent piety which she displayed in the service of her heavenly Spouse.

Lucian and Marcian accidentally beheld the servant of God; the sight made upon them so great an impression, that it excited in their hearts a violent and unholy desire of obtaining possession of her. Her station in life, however, was such that they knew, at once, all their expectations must naturally end in disappointment. Wherefore, seeing that ordinary means could be of no avail, they resolved to have recourse to the agency of magic spells. Full of confidence in the power of their artful devices, they set immediately to work. Incantations and evocations were employed night and

day; but the more they bestirred themselves to attain their wicked purpose, the less appearance there was of final success. They felt themselves completely at a loss.

The holy virgin, meanwhile, ignorant of the unhallowed machinations, of which she was the object, continued to commend herself to the care of the Lover of chaste souls, in whose keeping alone her virtue could enjoy perfect security. Prayer and works of charity covered her with an impenetrable buckler, against which all the darts of the enemy were utterly powerless. The magicians were forced to confess, at last, that an unseen hand protected their victim; yet, not satisfied with acknowledging their weakness, they were anxious to learn from the demons themselves the cause of their failure. For a long time were the evil spirits consulted in various ways, until, apparently weary of being unrelentingly evoked, they gave this answer:

“So long as you contented yourselves with practising your art, in order to bring under your power persons to whom the God of heaven is unknown, it was easy for us to lend you our assistance, whensoever we were called upon. You cannot deny this. But now, when you ask us to subdue for your sake a heart chaste and innocent, we own that all our efforts are unavailing. There are

persons over whom we have never possessed any power. The maiden, whose charms you covet, is of the number of those who have consecrated their bodies to Jesus Christ, their Lord and God, who died for them. Therefore He guards them with a care which surpasses the knowledge of men. Whenever we attempt aught against them, He causes us to undergo unutterable sufferings. Hence, we are forced to yield, in spite of ourselves, to a superior power; and we own ourselves defeated."

This public confession of the evil spirits so affected the two magicians that, struck with fear and wonder, they fell prostrate upon the ground, as if they were dead. When they recovered their senses, they looked at one another with astonishment.

At this very moment, the grace of God moving their hearts, they perceived that a complete change had come over them. "What!" they said, "if this Jesus, who was crucified for men, is so great and mighty, that even the invisible powers must obey His will; why should we refuse to submit ourselves to Him? Hence then, spirits of darkness; depart from us with your vain and illusory wiles; farewell to magic and its wicked deceits. We confess Jesus

Christ crucified for us, Him we adore, Him we are resolved to serve and glorify before men."

This unexpected conversion was not a sudden outburst of feeling: it was destined to be solid and lasting. Filled with a holy zeal and impelled by the spirit of sincerity, Lucian and Marcian repaired to the most public place of the city. There they built a large fire, and threw into the flames the books and various instruments which had served them in the practice of their magical arts. This extraordinary behavior astonished the people, who had hitherto been accustomed to look upon them as men whom the gods had endowed with supernatural powers. But, faithful to the grace they had received, they began to proclaim the mercy and greatness of the God of the Christians, who had led them from the darkness of error and superstition into the admirable light of the truth. "Blessed be the great God of heaven," they said, "who has brought us out of darkness and the shadow of death. He has opened our eyes, that we may behold the light of life, and walk in the paths that lead to bliss. We have wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction; but the way of the Lord we have not known. We have run after phantoms raised up by demons, the enemies of man: we have suffered ourselves to be deluded; we

have led others to seek after vanity and deception. But now, we confess the truth: we acknowledge our error; we place all our trust in the mercy of the true God, whom we have so long offended by our crimes. We ask pardon of all those whom we have misled by unholy practices; God grant that they, too, may come to the only and sure way of salvation."

Whereupon, they went to the nearest church, and made a public confession of their sins. Not long after, when they had been sufficiently instructed in the doctrines of the Christian Religion, they were admitted among the number of the Faithful, by receiving the Sacrament of Baptism. They did not suffer their first fervor to grow cold, but, inspired by the Spirit of God, they withdrew into the desert, where they led a life of the most austere penance. The study and contemplation of heavenly things occupied all their time; bodily macerations subdued by degrees the propensities of perverse nature—bread and water being their only food, which they took only once every third day—until they became, as it were, moulded beneath the hand of God, who had called them to give glory to His name before the multitude of the unbelievers.

From time to time they quitted their solitude to announce to the neighboring people the Word of

God: giving them a clear insight into the absurdities of Paganism, and making them understand that, after all the miseries and sufferings of this life, still greater woes were prepared for them hereafter, if they turned a deaf ear to the warnings which they had received. The Pagans whom they had thus addressed wondered and exclaimed: "Behold, are not these the men who were said to be initiated in all the mysteries of the gods; who could, at will, command the invisible powers; who were ever ready to help us in the gratification of our passions? Now they proclaim the doctrines of the Crucified, of whom they have heretofore spoken so much evil."

The servants of God said to them: "Believe us, brethren, when we tell you, that, if we had been able to discover a path different from the one upon which we have entered to attain to perfect happiness, assuredly we would never have acted as we have done. For we know that, in consequence of the step which we have taken, our journey through life will be beset with many hardships. But knowing that there can be no happiness here, nor hereafter, unless we follow in the footsteps of the Crucified, we have given up all to secure this one thing necessary. If you are wise, you will follow our example. Wait not till it is too late. Be converted.

If you dread future punishments, avoid them by acknowledging the only true God, whom we announce to you, and who is willing to extend His mercy unto you, even as He has done to us, His unworthy servants."

These words did not produce the effect which they desired; on the contrary, they excited in the people the greatest indignation. At first they clamored and endeavored to terrify them by threats. But, seeing that the bold Confessors of the Faith could not be intimidated in this manner, they seized and dragged them before Sabinus, the Proconsul. At that time the persecution of Decius was raging against the Church. It was not difficult to induce the Proconsul to yield to the prejudices of the multitude, especially when he was informed, that these two men were now defending what they had formerly condemned, that they assailed in the strongest terms the worship of the gods of the Empire; in short, that they were Christians.

The Proconsul, addressing Lucian, asked him his name.

"My name is Lucian," he replied.

"What profession dost thou follow?" said Sabinus.

"For a long time, I had no other occupation than that of reviling the Christian Religion, and of

persecuting its followers; now, however, although unworthy, I have the happiness not only of professing Christianity, but also of preaching its doctrines to others."

"By what authority darest thou preach that Religion?"

"Every one has a right to do this; for the natural—as well as the common—law enjoins on every man, to withdraw his brother from the errors, whereby he sees him misled: by so doing he frees his brother from the snares of the demon, and acquires great merit before God."

Then the Proconsul, turning to Marcian, said:

"And thou, what is thy name?"

"My name is Marcian," answered the Confessor.

"Of what condition art thou?"

"I am freeborn, and I profess the Christian Religion."

This bold avowal seemed to disconcert Sabinus, for instead of proceeding with the interrogatory, he reflected for some time, as if debating with himself. At last, assuming an authoritative tone, he said to them:

"Who has put it into your heads to forsake the worship of the great and immortal gods, who have heaped their favors upon you, and who, at one time, made you the delight of the people? Who has

persuaded you to betake yourselves to the service of a Man who was put to an ignominious death, and was too powerless to save Himself from the persecution of His enemies?"

"It is He Himself," replied Marcian, "of whom you speak, who by His infinite goodness, has pardoned our misdeeds, even as He pardoned the blessed Paul, whom from a persecutor of the Church He changed into a preacher of the glad tidings of salvation."

"I counsel you," said the Proconsul, "to look to your own interests. Return to the worship of your fathers; and, by following this wholesome advice of mine, strive to render the immortal gods propitious, and to regain the favor of the masters of the earth, our invincible Emperors. Above all, remember that your lives depend upon the resolution which you may choose to take."

"Your advice," answered Lucian, "is certainly not such as a wise and prudent man would give. The vain and transitory things of time should never be preferred to the true and abiding blessings of eternity. All we can say is, that we render thanks to God for that He has drawn us out of the darkness, wherein we were groping, to raise us to the glory prepared for us in the life to come—provided we continue faithful to Him."



"If all you say of this God of yours," said Sabinus, "is true, why then does He not undertake to defend you? Why did He suffer you to fall into my hands? If He is so good, why does He not come to your assistance, when you are exposed to the greatest dangers?"

To this Marcian replied: "The greatest happiness of a Christian is to lose, for the sake of his divine Master, the present life—which in reality is not the true life but only its shadow—in order to secure the life of the hereafter—which is the life indeed, true and everlasting. Wherefore, we humbly beseech the great God, whom we adore, to grant you grace, and to enlighten your understanding, that you also may know Him, and submit yourself to His infinite power and goodness, which He manifests to them that believe in Him."

To this answer of the servant of God, Sabinus replied scornfully: "Your God, whose goodness you extol, gives undoubtedly a convincing proof of His love for you, by allowing you to fall into my hands."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Lucian, "although you take a wrong view of this matter. Have we not told you already that it is a Christian's boast to despise the things of earth? The promises of our Lord do not regard the present life only—

wherein they are to us a perennial source of bliss—they regard, above all, the life to come, where joys without end await those who have trampled under foot the false pleasures of this world.”

“That is all nonsense,” said the Proconsul, “children might believe such stories. If you are wise, you will follow my advice: obey the orders of the Emperor, by offering sacrifice to the gods. Force me not to adopt measures irksome to my feelings, and most painful to yourselves.”

“We are fully prepared,” answered Marcian, “to undergo every punishment you may deem proper to inflict upon us. Do not waste your time, by uselessly endeavoring to make us change our minds. We are firmly resolved not to abandon the worship of the true God. For how can you expect that we would be willing to live in error and wilful ignorance during this fleeting life, to be afterwards cast into exterior darkness, and into a fire not to be extinguished forever—which is prepared for the demon and his deluded slaves?”

Sabinus, seeing that it would be a useless attempt to overcome the constancy of the two Christian heroes, pronounced against them the following sentence: “The two individuals, named Lucian and Marcian, found guilty by us of transgressing our holy laws, and of professing the superstitions of

Christianity; after we have used in vain the most pressing solicitations to make them obey the edicts of our invincible Emperors, and after we have threatened to no purpose that, unless they offer sacrifice to the immortal gods, we will inflict upon them the severest penalty of the law; are condemned, for wickedly despising the gods of the Empire, to be burnt alive."

This sentence filled the holy Martyrs with the greatest joy. They began now to see the fulfilment of their most ardent desires. Wherefore, when led to the place of execution, they returned thanks to God, who had shown so great a mercy to them, and exclaimed: "Lord Jesus, we praise and bless Thee, because, when we were Thine enemies, Thou didst not cast us off, but, in spite of our unworthiness, mindful only of Thy goodness, Thou didst call us from Paganism to the knowledge of Thy holy law. Nor was this enough for Thy infinite mercy. This day, Thou addest to Thy other favors bestowed upon us, the crowning glory of deeming us worthy of laying down our lives for Thy holy name. Receive, O Lord, the sacrifice which we offer to Thee. Into Thy hands we commend ourselves."

When they finished this prayer, the executioners set fire to the funeral pile, and, in a short time, the

Martyrs had exchanged the miseries of this life for the endless joys of heaven.

They suffered on the twenty-sixth of October, on which day also their memory is honored by the Church.





## XII.

ST. JULITTA.

**T**O GIVE up all for the love of Christ—in order to secure the priceless jewel, the value whereof the spirit of the world does not understand—has ever been the practice of the Saints. And the greater the difficulties are, which accompany the sacrifice of that which worldlings hold dearest upon earth, the more they challenge the admiration of men—even when they confess themselves too weak, to look upon so noble a conduct as an object worthy of their imitation. Yet, they that are Christ's have in all ages shown themselves ready to forego the good things of this life, that they might receive the inheritance of the life to come. Neither age, nor sex, nor condition here below, can present obstacles which are accounted insurmountable, when the true spirit of the Gospel animates the heart of the faithful Christian. This is proved to



us in a striking manner by the life and Martyrdom of the Blessed Julitta and her infant son Cyrus.

Descending from a race of kings in ancient Lycaonia, Julitta possessed all the advantages which fortune can bestow. Esteemed and beloved by all, her great wealth enabled her to adorn the high rank which she occupied among the inhabitants of Iconium, her native city. To relieve the poor and destitute, to comfort the afflicted, to instruct the ignorant, seemed to be her mission upon earth, with which the cares of her immense household were never allowed to interfere. Whilst thus acting according to the dictates inspired by Religion, she enjoyed that happiness upon earth, which the consciousness of duties well fulfilled alone can give. But the life of man is a warfare: and they that are ambitious to distinguish themselves look eagerly for trials and struggles, through which, by the help of the Divine Master whom they serve, they hope to pass unscathed. Such also was the desire of the noble Julitta. Her prayers, her works of mercy, all aimed at this, that she might obtain, if it were God's holy will, the crown of glory promised to them that prove they possess the charity—than which none hath a greater—of laying down their life for Christ. Nor was the opportunity of so doing long delayed.

The persecution, which assailed the Church under Diocletian, extended to every part of the Roman Empire. Lycaonia soon felt its heavy pressure, perhaps more cruelly than any other province. Domitian, its Governor, was a person naturally of a savage and bloodthirsty character. He seemed to find his delight amid scenes of ferocious barbarity. The blood of Christians was made to flow in every town and hamlet. Many of them, however, by gratifying the cupidity of the Governor, succeeded in obtaining for themselves a momentary safety. By the advice of her relations and friends, Julitta withdrew to Seleucia, taking with her Cyrus, her son, a child about three years of age, and two maid-servants. Her journey was one full of hardships and dangers. The rugged and mountainous country presented everywhere unforeseen obstacles, but the grace of Him for whom she underwent these trials supported her amidst every difficulty. They arrived at last at the place where they hoped to find an asylum. But they were wholly disappointed.

Alexander, the Governor of Cilicia, was, if possible, still worse affected toward the Christians than the wicked Domitian. He had just received an imperial edict, whereby it was ordered, that all Christians,—no matter what their rank or condition,

who were unwilling to offer sacrifice to the gods of the Empire—should suffer capital punishment, after undergoing every torture, which the officers of the law might choose to inflict.

At first, Julitta was at a loss what course to pursue. She remembered, however, that the Apostle had said "Give place unto wrath," and resolved at once to seek out another place of retreat. Wherefore, she set out for Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia. But it so happened that Alexander, the Governor, left Seleucia on the same day with the Christians, and overtook them on the road. Julitta herself carried her infant son in her arms. When the Governor saw them, he suspected at once that they were Christians. Immediately, he gave orders that they should be arrested, and taken in his train to Tarsus. The two servants, perceiving their dangerous situation, and afraid of the tortures which awaited them, resolved to effect their escape, which they succeeded in doing. Nevertheless, as they deemed it unbecoming to abandon their mistress altogether, they afterwards made their way to the city, that by their words and looks, or at least by their presence, they might in some way be enabled to encourage the generous Julitta in her struggle for the Faith.

After their arrival in Tarsus, Alexander ordered

her to appear before him. Julitta, knowing beforehand the fate which awaited her, called upon God to strengthen her in this trial, that she might bear testimony to the truth, and give to all an example of constancy, in spite of the natural weakness and timidity of her sex. She stood, therefore, in the presence of the Governor, her little son by her side. Alexander began the interrogatory with the usual formula :

“What is thy name?” said he.

“My name is Julitta, a servant of Christ,” replied the lady.

“From what country art thou?” asked the Governor.

“I am a Christian,” answered Julitta; “a Christian’s country is everywhere.”

“What rank, what condition dost thou hold in society?”

“I am a Christian. I regard no other rank or condition.”

These answers enraged the irritable Governor. Without the least consideration for the tender feelings of a mother, he commanded his attendants to take away the child, to stretch Julitta upon the rack, and whip her with thongs. This order was forthwith executed. But when they endeavored to tear away the little Cyrus from the arms of his

mother, his cries were so heart-rending, his struggles so earnest and continued, that the barbarous executioners themselves were moved to pity. In fact, the very countenance of the little child seemed to bespeak his noble extraction; the sweetness of his looks, the tenderness of his age, above all, the cruel doom that awaited him, aroused the sympathy of the spectators, although the frequency of similar punishments had rendered them familiar with scenes of inhuman severity.

The pitiless Governor, however, appeared wholly unmoved. He insisted that the child should be taken away by force and brought to him. Alexander held him on his knees, and endeavored by kind words and caresses to pacify the little sufferer. But all his efforts proved unavailing: Cyrus could not be induced to withdraw his eyes from his suffering mother, nor would he cease to stretch forth his arms beseechingly to her. And when Julitta, amidst the tortures which racked her body exclaimed: "I am a Christian," the child re-echoed the cry, "I am a Christian."

This agonizing state could not long be continued. The Governor, indeed, understood full well, what emotions filled the bosoms of the multitude that surrounded his tribunal; but, as if eager to show that he could trample under foot every sentiment

of pity, he suddenly seized the little child by the foot, and dashed his head against the edge of the steps of the tribunal. The blood and brains of the infant Martyr bespattered the tribunal and all the places around. The sight of this sickening spectacle filled the minds of the spectators with horror and disgust, but, instead of disheartening, encouraged the heroic Julitta. She returned thanks to God, who deigned to call unto Him and adorn with a Martyr's crown, the beloved child, whose future destiny was the only source of uneasiness which she felt in the midst of her sufferings for the Faith.

Alexander, ashamed of what he had done, but, at the same time, anxious to divert the attention of the spectators from his own brutal conduct, turned his rage against the remaining victim, still stretched upon the rack. He now commanded the executioners to tear the body of Julitta with iron hooks, and to pour boiling pitch upon her feet. Meanwhile, through a refinement of cruelty, and as if he were desirous of sparing the life of the childless mother, he ordered the public cryer to proclaim aloud, that all might bear witness to his good intentions: "Julitta, have pity on thyself, sacrifice to the gods, before it be too late, and free thyself from further torments. Be wise in time, lest the evil fate of thy son also befall thee."

Although these words were frequently repeated, the generous Martyr made ever the same answer: "I offer no sacrifice to demons, nor to deaf and dumb statues; I adore Christ the Only-begotten Son of God, by whom the Father hath created all things. As to my child, I know that even now he rejoices in the delights of the kingdom of heaven; and I long for the moment which is to unite me with him forever."

The Governor, convinced that the constancy of Julitta could not be shaken by any amount of torture, and, perhaps aware that his barbarity was producing a very unfavorable impression on the multitude, pronounced this sentence: "I command that Julitta, who openly declares herself a Christian, be instantly beheaded; and that the body of her son be dragged and thrown into the pit destined to receive the bodies of criminals."

The executioners then unloosened Julitta, and led her to the place of execution. When arrived there, she entreated them to grant her a moment's time that she might offer her prayer to God. Having obtained her request, she prayed with a loud and firm voice:

"I give thanks to Thee, O Lord, because Thou didst call my beloved son unto Thee; deign to bestow the same blessing upon me, Thy unworthy

servant. Grant that this day I may be admitted into the nuptial chamber, where Thou crownest with heavenly bliss the prudent Virgins; that, saved from the miseries of this life, my spirit may bless and glorify Thy Father, the Creator and Preserver of all things, together with the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen."

When she pronounced the word "Amen," the executioner severed the head from her body. Her remains were thrown into the same place, where the body of her martyred child lay still unburied. On the following day, however, her two maids, who had been eye-witnesses of the Martyrdom of their kind mistress,—but from a distance, lest they might be recognized—came and carried off the two bodies. They buried them reverently in a grotto near the city. Afterwards, when peace was restored to the Church, one of them, who had reached a very old age, made known the spot where reposed the sacred remains of the two Martyrs. Hither the Christians came in crowds to honor the precious relics, and to implore the intercession of the Friends of God, "striving every one of them to procure some portion of those sacred pledges for a protection and safeguard against the wiles of the Evil one."

The Church keeps the festival of the Blessed Julitta and her infant son, on the sixteenth of June.



### XIII.

#### ST. VICTOR AND HIS COMPANIONS.

**M**ASSILIA, the modern Marseilles, was celebrated in ancient times as one of the chief cities of the Roman Empire. The beauty of the surrounding country, the mildness of the climate ; above all, its position on the Mediterranean, at the entrance of Gaul, had made it the great emporium of commerce between the different nations of the then known world. Its inhabitants,—composed partly of the original Greek colonists, of Romans, who had repaired thither to recruit their squandered fortunes, and partly of Gauls, who had forsaken the habits of their rude and independent life to devote themselves to civilized pursuits,—were distinguished for all the human virtues and vices, to which their original education had trained them. This blending of different nationalities had, in like manner, produced among the people an endless

variety of all forms of superstitious worship; the false deities of every country of the Empire were held in honor, the only true and saving Religion was held in abhorrence. As self-interest was the mainspring of all the undertakings of the people of Marseilles, it is natural to expect that flattery, rather than love or respect for their rulers, would prompt them to comply with their wishes. Hence it happened that, at the approach of their Sovereign, if he were known to be an enemy of the Faith, the people of this great city were wont to signalize their devotedness by so cruel a persecution of the Christians, that they seemed wholly to forget the claims of nature and affection. Neither kindred, age, nor condition could soften their hearts to pity. One of the noblest victims of this foolish and servile flattery of the masters of the Empire, was the noble and generous soldier of Christ, the blessed Victor.

Victor was a veteran soldier. Throughout his military career, he had distinguished himself as much by his bravery and success, as he was eminent by the nobility of his birth, and by his personal accomplishments. As a Christian, he was a pattern of every virtue. Meek, humble, patient, fervent, full of charity, he was the support of his brethren amidst their trials: dreading naught but sin, it was his constant aim to inspire others with the same

courage and constancy, that had been his rule of action during all the troubles and hardships which had beset his eventful life. The name he had received in Baptism ever reminded him, that God willed him to be superior to all the wiles and assaults of the powers of darkness.

The Emperor Maximian Hercules came to Marseilles. His reputation had preceded him. He was looked upon as the fiercest of the tyrants that had disgraced the Roman purple. His stay in Gaul had been marked everywhere with the blood of the Faithful. Thousands had been sacrificed to gratify his insatiable desire of extinguishing the Christian name. Forgetful of his own interest, as well as of his popularity with the army, so necessary to his ambitious views, he had massacred the famous Theban Legion, because its members could not be shaken in the fidelity which they owed to the God of armies. Rejoicing in his power, and boastful of his impiety, this wicked prince appeared to have no other aim than to render himself an object of dread to virtue and humanity. His arrival in the city was, consequently, the signal for beginning a general persecution against the Christians. Many of them, fearing the wrath to come, had already fled into the neighboring country; others, unwilling to abandon their families, and relying upon the protection of

the Lord whom they served, resolved to await the storm and breast its fury.

Among these the valiant Victor was indeed a tower of strength. Like a true soldier of Christ, he spent his days and nights in visiting the camp of his brethren. He cheered on the brave, he encouraged the faint-hearted, he taught the wavering to despise the transitory things of life, and to look up to the abiding reward of glory that was destined to be their portion in eternity. He was an adviser, a guide, a father to all. Whilst engaged in this holy avocation, the future Martyr could not long escape the watchful eyes of the enemies of his Faith. He was arrested and led before the tribunal of the Prefect. This officer, struck with the noble bearing of the veteran warrior, saw at once, that it would be useless to attempt intimidation, as a means of inducing him to offer sacrifice to the gods of the Empire. He endeavored, therefore, to persuade him by kind words:

“Victor,” he said, “the country thou hast served so long and so faithfully makes another claim on thee. Thou art accused of despising our gods. Thou hast abandoned the military service of the Empire, it is said, to join our enemies. Thou foregoest the favor of thy lawful prince, and the rewards which he holds out, to give adherence to the teach-

ings of a Man, who, many years ago, was put to death as a disturber of the peace and a teacher of a false and impracticable philosophy. Why wouldst thou deify and worship this Man, and forsake the gods, who have established the power of Rome over the whole earth, who preserve her institutions and watch over her greatness?"

Victor replied: "I have served my country long, and, I trust, faithfully, as you say. I thought it my duty so to do; because the service which I rendered received the approval of my conscience. Never would I join the enemies of the Empire; but I glory in belonging to its best friends and firmest supporters. The gods, of whom you speak, I neither reverence nor worship; they are neither great, nor good, nor wise, nor generous. Their power to protect the majesty of Rome is wholly imaginary: they are in reality nothing but unclean demons, who lead their deluded worshippers into wickedness during this life, and into misery and torments hereafter. Do not suppose that I am afraid of their power, or of their vengeance. I despise both. As regards the favor of the Emperor, I heed it not. I renounce beforehand all rank and distinction, whether in the army or at the court of the prince. Before all other things, I am a soldier of Jesus Christ: Him I worship, in His service I am

ready to die. You seem to imagine that He was merely a man, like ourselves. It is not so. He is the Son of the Most High, the Lord and Creator of heaven and earth. He, indeed, chose to take upon Himself our human nature: He suffered and died for our redemption; but, if He permitted the ungodly to treat Him thus, it was because the love of His Heart for us poor mortals, prompted Him thereto. If amid His torments, He appeared to the eyes of the unbelieving as an outcast, He also showed His power by arising on the third day from among the dead, and by ascending into heaven, in the sight of a vast multitude of men, there to take possession of an everlasting Kingdom—conquered by His sufferings. This is the God, whom I serve and adore: the true and living God."

At these words of the bold Confessor of the Faith, the crowd, that surrounded the tribunal, uttered a loud cry of indignation. They seemed ready to proceed to acts of violence, doubtless imagining that, by so doing, they would gain the favorable regard of Maximian, who, for the present, had made his abode among them. The Prefect, however, considering the rank of the accused and the reputation which he enjoyed, deemed it proper to resist the attempts of the rash multitude, and to



refer the matter to the Emperor. He said, therefore, to the Martyr :

“Thy offense is against the majesty of the Empire. Cæsar himself is in our midst; thou shalt have a hearing before him. He will determine thy fate, according to his wisdom and justice.”

“It matters not,” replied Victor, “whether I be tried before Cæsar or before his representative. The God whom I serve will one day judge the masters of the earth, as well as the least of their subjects. Truth and innocence do not dread the judgments of men.”

When it was reported to the Emperor, that one of the officers of his army boldly professed himself a Christian, he was exceedingly angry. He gave orders that Victor should forthwith be brought before him.

At the sight of the Martyr, Maximian could with difficulty contain his rage. Nevertheless, he controlled himself so far as to listen, with an apparent calmness, to the manifold accusations preferred against the noble prisoner. When these were finished, he said to Victor :

“Dost thou acknowledge the truthfulness of these charges ?”

“Some of them are true,” replied Victor, “others are false.”

“How meanest thou?”

“That I am an enemy of the Empire, or do not give due honor to the princes, who watch over its prosperity, is false; that I worship not your gods, is true.”

“Thou hast been a brave and faithful soldier until now.”

“I have striven to do my duty.”

“I am not ungrateful, I love to honor and reward him who deserves well of his country.”

“To be able to reward the meritorious services of others is deemed the noblest prerogative of princes.”

“Maximian will honor and reward Victor, but on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“Go into the temple, offer incense to the gods,—preservers of Rome.”

“I am a Christian.”

“Darest thou avow thyself a follower of that infamous sect?”

“I am a Christian: there can be no infamy in being true to one's God, and to one's country.

“Renounce thy odious profession, or I will make thee undergo such hardships and tortures, that the very mention of them will fill the country with terror.”

“A true Christian,” said Victor, “never renounces

his Religion. Hardships do not frighten me: a long life, spent in the camp and in the field, has before now inured me to them. The God, whom I adore, can and will support me amidst tortures, and render them not only bearable but pleasant to me—if I suffer for His sake.”

“Obey our command,” cried the enraged Emperor. “Go instantly, offer sacrifice to the gods.”

“Command me what is right and just, I will obey with pleasure; but I am a Christian. I offer no sacrifice to demons.”

The wrath of Maximian now knew no bounds, yet, he seemed at a loss how to make the Martyr feel the full weight of his vengeance. Thinking, however, that by a veteran warrior public disgrace would be more keenly felt than any bodily torture, he resolved to combine both punishments. He ordered, therefore, that his hands and feet should be bound with ropes, and that, in this disgraceful condition, he should be dragged through all the streets of the city. The execution of this barbarous sentence attracted immediately an immense crowd of the populace. They who before had looked with reverence upon the generous soldier, now vied with one another in heaping every sort of insult and ignominy upon his person. All seemed anxious to please the Emperor by seconding, in the most

extravagant manner, this bloodthirsty cruelty,—as if they deemed it a favor to add, in some way, to the tortures of the innocent sufferer.

The savage sport is ended. The Martyr all bruised and bleeding is, notwithstanding, taken again before the tribunal of the Prefect. This officer seemed to believe, that the treatment he had received, would have induced Victor to desist from his firm resolve of enduring every torment rather than renounce his Faith. He began, therefore, to exhort him to listen, at last, to the voice of those that advised him to secure the favor of the Emperor, by complying with his orders. The warrior, who lay before him exhausted and scarcely breathing, made no answer. This encouraged the Prefect to proceed:

“Victor,” he said, “can it be possible that, soldier as thou art, thou preferrest the very depths of infamy to the glory which awaits thee before the army and the people? Consider how great a folly it is, to reject the favor and friendship of the gods, and of the Princes of Rome; to give up the pleasures and honors of the world, nay more, thy body and thy very life; for what? for the hope of a reward in a life after the present, for an imaginary possession, which no one has ever seen, or known. O how great must be thy infatuation! Heedlessly

and thoughtlessly, thou drawest upon thyself all the horrors of human vengeance, the merciless wrath of the Cæsars,—and all this in the sight of thy once admiring friends and relatives, who will never again lift up their heads, bowed down as they are beneath the heavy load of grief and disgrace, brought upon them by their noblest representative. Reflect, O warrior; consult thy dearest interest, while yet thou hast time,—while imperial mercy is ready to stretch forth a saving hand.”

“Is this a time to taunt me thus?” said the Martyr. “Is this wreck of former strength and vigor still worth preserving, and that by the means which you propose?”

“Say, that thou wilt cease to despise the immortal gods, whose majesty shines forth in our temples, whose blessings are bestowed upon all. Promise, that thou wilt worship them, even as the princes of the Empire, yea, and the lowliest of the people, worship them, and, with their anger, thy misfortunes shall have an end.”

“Alas! neither in this life, nor in the next,” whispered Victor, “were I so cowardly as to follow such an advice.”

The Prefect, who appeared possessed of but one idea—that of bringing about the apostasy of the heroic sufferer—did not perceive the determined

courage which animated the very countenance of Victor. He continued his address :

“Why wouldst thou put thy trust in a God, who lived poor upon earth, who died despised by men? Had He been powerful, as gods should be, would He have suffered in that manner? Renounce Him at once. Do not force Cæsar to condemn thee to tortures, whereof that which thou hast already suffered is but as the shadow to the reality. Be wise in time. Do not insult Cæsar and the Commonwealth by spurning their generous offers.”

At these words, the Martyr, strengthened by the victory which he had gained, filled with the grace which God gives to them that are tried for His sake, arose, and summoning up all his courage, as if facing again the foes of his country, addressed the Prefect, the officers, and the multitude that surrounded the tribunal :

“If in this trial, which I am made to undergo before you all, there were merely question of the interests of Cæsar and of the Republic, my only defense would be to declare solemnly, that I have never injured the Emperor, that I have never failed in the respect due to his person; that I have ever been ready to serve him in the profession which I have hitherto followed. Every day, together with my brethren, I offer sacrifice for the safety of Cæsar,



and for the prosperity of the whole Empire. Daily, too, I present to my God a priceless and unbloody Victim, that He may bless and preserve the Commonwealth. But, would it not be the extreme of folly and blindness to devote one's self wholly to a particular object, in preference to another which is a thousand times more excellent? What would it be, if that same object were neither according to your wishes, nor enjoyable without anxiety, nor solid, nor permanent? and if the other were all you could desire, abiding, ever-satisfying, perfect? Now, there is no sensible man among you all, who does not know that the favor of princes, the pleasures of this world, glory, honor, friends, health and life itself, are possessions which none can obtain at will, hold securely, or keep for a long time. Hence, you must confess, that it is right and reasonable to prefer to them the unutterable and solid delights, which spring from the enjoyment of God, the Author of the universe. Him we possess so soon as we love Him, and with Him we possess all things. Out of His exhaustless and everlasting treasures He draws the boundless rewards, which He bestows upon them who, for His sake, give up the vain and short-lived pleasures of this life. Hence, death has no terror for us; since it is the way which leads to bliss. Hence, we willingly undergo torments;

because they extinguish the fires of hell. Thus we turn into blessings that which you look upon as simply evils. But you, in your blindness, worship as a god the worst of your enemies; him you serve in this life, and thereby draw upon yourselves unending miseries in the life of the hereafter. And who is that enemy whereof I speak? It is vice, that teaches, by word and example, the most shameful disorders. You cannot deny, that the verses which you recite and sing in public, are a means of teaching your fellow-men. Now, what is the burden of these songs and canticles, which are heard in your theatres and in your temples? Is it not an endless list of crimes and infamies, sanctioned and committed by your gods? What you would punish in men, you honor in your deities, and, inconsistent in your principles and practice, you degrade your reason and pervert your judgment."

When the blessed Martyr began to enumerate the well-known crimes attributed to the gods of Paganism, there arose at first a long murmur among the spectators, which soon burst forth into loud exclamations. Some cried out, that he should forthwith be put to the torture; others, admiring his courage and fortitude, insisted that he should be heard. The Prefect, who did not abandon the hope of causing him to apostatize, said to the Martyr:

“If thou hast aught else to say, let us hear it.”

“Yes,” replied Victor, “I have fairly portrayed the character of your gods, and shown to you, why they deserve rather the contempt and execration of rational men, than their veneration. How different is the God whom we adore! How worthy of our love and adoration is He who, when we were His enemies, loved us first, yea with an eternal love! To save us from the snares and deceits of wicked demons, He became man—not losing aught of His Divinity, but clothing Himself with our human nature—and dwelled amongst us. O how rich was that poverty, which you blame in Him, when, at His word, ships were filled with fish, when, with five loaves, He fed five thousand men! How strong was His weakness which healed all our infirmities! How life-giving was His mortal nature, which commanded the dead to arise from the tomb! Do you, perhaps, doubt the truth of these miracles? All these things had been foretold from the beginning, and, according to His promises, are performed by His followers even in our own day, as you yourselves can attest. O, would that your eyes were opened, that you might behold the greatness of Him whom all nature obeys! And then, what was there ever more holy than His life? more pure than His doctrine? more beneficial than His promises? more

dreadful than His threats? more secure than His protection? more lovely than His friendship? more ravishing than His glory?—Who among your gods is like unto Him? All the gods of the Gentiles are devils: therefore they, and their worshippers, shall be condemned to everlasting fire. But our God hath made the heavens; therefore, ‘Blessed are they that fear the Lord; that walk in His ways.’ Wherefore, most noble and learned men, use the keenness of your intellect; lay aside for a moment all hatred and contention; examine the questions fairly, and weigh impartially the reasons advanced by both parties. Degrade no longer the image of the Divinity, which is in you; forsake the unclean demons, who are hurrying you into endless ruin. Acknowledge your Maker, your Benefactor, so holy, so beautiful, so just, so merciful—whose lowliness will raise you up, whose poverty will enrich you, whose death will restore you to life; whose saving warnings now call upon you, whose rewards invite you; that He may receive you into His everlasting glory, and gladden you with His friendship forever!”

When the Martyr ceased speaking, the Prefect stood abashed and was unable to make a reply. He saw that the arguments, adduced by the veteran warrior in favor of the truth, were unanswerable,

yet he was unwilling, or too timid, to make a frank avowal of his real sentiments. The other officers, who presided with him at this trial, were not less confused. Soon, however, they began to consult among themselves, to know what course they should pursue. As might have been expected from persons whose minds were set upon the things of this world, they concluded to gain by force, what they could not obtain by false and deceitful reasonings. The Prefect then said to him :

“Victor, wilt thou never stop philosophizing?”

“I cannot but speak the things which I know to be for your own good, and for the advantage of all them that hear me,” answered the Martyr.

“Make thy choice of two things: either to appease the gods by offering sacrifice, or to perish miserably.”

“If that be the alternative which you propose,” said Victor, “I must needs confirm by my example what I have taught by my words. I despise your gods; I confess Jesus Christ. Now heap upon me whatsoever torments you may choose: I am ready to endure them all for my Faith.”

This fearless answer of the Martyr so exasperated the Prefect and the officers, that there arose a dispute among them, each one claiming the privilege of

wreaking vengeance on the enemy of the gods. Eutichius, who had hitherto conducted the trial, at last resigned his right in favor of Asterius, his brother-officer. This man no sooner had the Martyr in his power, than he ordered him to be stretched upon the rack. His sufferings were long and intense. Victor, raising his eyes to heaven—whence alone he could expect consolation—prayed aloud:

“Lord Jesus, grant me patience, grant me strength.” His hopes were not disappointed. He beheld the heavens opened: his blessed Redeemer, holding in one hand the cross—the emblem of victory through sufferings—appeared to him. He looked down upon the generous sufferer, and with a smile of encouragement, said:

“Peace be with thee, Victor. I am Jesus, who suffer in My Saints whatsoever insults and torments they endure. Be of good cheer. I support thee in the struggle: I am waiting to crown thee after thou hast conquered.”

At these words of the Saviour, all the bodily pains of the Martyr suddenly vanished. His countenance became calm, his eyes shone with the brightness of ecstatic joy. In his heart, he sang a hymn of thankfulness to the God, who deigned to visit and comfort His servant. Meanwhile the

executioners, although they continually relieved one another, grew weary with tormenting the unconquerable soldier of Christ. Seeing that all their efforts proved useless, and that, on the contrary, the Martyr seemed to derive new strength from his very sufferings, they began to expostulate with the Prefect. Asterius ordered them to loosen the prisoner, and to cast him into the darkest dungeon of the city. Nor was he satisfied, that by so doing he had secured the noble athlete; for he could not but perceive that there was something supernatural in the whole conduct of Victor. Wherefore, to prevent every untoward accident, he gave orders that a guard of three soldiers should be placed near the door of the prison.

But the Saviour, who, on the last day, shall say to them that are at the left, "I was sick and in prison, and ye did not visit Me," did not forget the noble champion, who had so boldly confessed His name before men. About the middle of the night, when the deepest silence reigned all around, the door of the dungeon is suddenly thrown open: a light far brighter than that of the sun illumines the Martyr's cell. Struck with amazement at the sight, the three soldiers fall prostrate on the ground. They hear the sounds of heavenly melody,

they distinguish words of praise and thanksgiving to God, the Creator and Redeemer.

So soon as the singing ceases, and the marvellous vision disappears, the soldiers arise, and, with one consent, enter the dungeon, throw themselves at the feet of the Martyr, and beg his pardon for the harsh treatment he has received at their hands. Victor shows to them, that, were they to know the happiness of suffering for Christ, they would not pity, but rather envy him. "And yet," said he, "that which, doubtless, you have just now witnessed is but a foreshadowing of the never-ending bliss which awaits the Christian after this life. The Lord Jesus hath sent down His angels to comfort and strengthen His unworthy servant."

"Noble warrior," they said, "have pity on us. Teach us how we may become partakers of that happiness in the next world. What must we do to be saved?"

"Believe in God, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, whom He has sent into the world for the salvation of men. Repent of your sins, and be baptized."

"We believe," they exclaimed, "that the God of the Christians is the only true God, the Creator and Lord of the universe. We ask for baptism."

Thereupon, Victor instructs them briefly in the principal points of the Christian doctrine: after which he sends one of them into the city, directing him to the dwelling of a Priest. When the minister of God learns what has taken place in the prison of the Martyr, he hastens joyfully to the place, designated for their meeting. There he finds the blessed Victor and his two companions, engaged in prayer. Without delay they proceed together to the sea-shore, where the three new converts are baptized by the priest, the Martyr being their sponsor. The three neophytes were called Alexander, Longinus and Felician.

In the morning, it became known throughout the city what had taken place in and around the dungeon, where the Martyr was confined. When Maximian was apprised of it, his fury knew no bounds. He swore, that Victor should be held responsible for what had occurred. Immediately, he issues his orders, that the three soldiers be forced to offer sacrifice to the gods, or put to death in a manner that may serve as a warning to others.

The Martyr, who knew beforehand what was to be expected from the cruelty of the Emperor, prepared his brother-soldiers, now also his sons

in Christ, for the coming struggle, and encouraged them by these words :

“Soldiers of Christ, my generous companions, now is the time to display your courage as well as your power of endurance. Preserve manfully the fidelity, which you have but just now promised to your glorious Leader Jesus, the Son of the Eternal God. The enemy approaches, the battle is at hand. You have scarcely enlisted beneath the banners of the Cross, and already the foe, hoping to find you unprepared for the encounter, seeks to entice you from the path of duty, relying on an easy victory over your inexperience. But, my friends, you are not so untrained as he imagines. The discipline of an earthly warfare is not now lost for you, although the object is changed. You, who have fought for what is vain and perishable, are now called upon to battle for what is real and imperishable. So act that your heroism may win the approval of your heavenly King, who has chosen you, although but recently received into His army, to stand in the front rank, in defense of Religion. Let your enemies learn that, by enrolling yourselves under a nobler banner, you have lost naught of your accustomed bravery. Let no transitory dread hinder you from seizing the palm of victory, which lies now within your grasp.

With the eyes of Faith, behold your King advancing before you, and opening the path that leads to endless glory. Listen to His voice, as He cheers you on: 'In the world you shall have distress, but have confidence, I have overcome the world.' Call upon Him in your heart and with your voice. He that hath said: 'I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world,' will hear your prayer. For the glory of His name, I may give my own experience as a confirmation of the truth of my words. When, yesterday, I lay stretched upon the rack, in the midst of my agonizing pains, I called upon my merciful Saviour. Instantly, He appeared to me, holding in His hand the instrument of our Redemption, and said: 'Peace be with thee, Victor. Fear not, I am Jesus, who suffer in My Saints the insults and torments which they endure.' These words filled my soul with so great a sweetness and strength, that all my pains vanished at once. Wherefore, my brothers, my sons in Christ, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the author of our salvation; regard not the idle threats of mortal men, ye, who are now on the point of being received into the joyous company of the Angels. And as but lately, in the service of your country, you would have preferred death to the disgrace of a

defeat—although the one as well as the other would have hurled you into everlasting destruction—now conquer, I beseech you, by a generous confession of your Faith, that you may reign forever in bliss.”

Hardly had the Martyr finished this exhortation, when the officers made their appearance. These led them forthwith to the upper Forum, where the crowd of spectators was so great, that it seemed as if the whole city were present. Some had come thither to show their hatred of the Christians, others through a desire of seeing the Martyrs triumph over the powers of darkness. At the sight of the Martyrs, the populace filled the air with tumultuous shouts; they cursed Victor, and insulted him with every opprobrious epithet. The Martyr, without showing the least agitation of mind, with smiling countenance, and cheerful words, encouraged his three companions. When, however, the mob cried out to him: “Restore to the worship of the gods, these soldiers whom thou hast seduced;” he turned to them and said: “It is neither right nor becoming, that I should destroy what I have but now built up.”

Alexander, Longinus and Felician, were first interrogated by the Prefect. They answered firmly and briefly, that, “By the grace and mercy

of God, they were Christians; that they were ready to lay down their lives in defense of their Faith, and that no earthly power could induce them to renounce the allegiance, which they owed to Jesus Christ, their Lord and Redeemer."

The Prefect then made use of promises and threats: they remained firm and unshaken. Fearing, doubtless, that tortures would only serve to display their courage and the sincerity of their conversion to the Faith, Maximian had given orders, in the event of their not yielding to promises and threats, that they should be put to death on the very spot. This sentence was accordingly put into execution. The three Martyrs were beheaded, and thus, by suffering death in time, they secured the life of bliss in eternity.

Meanwhile, the blessed Victor, knowing that his companions, the objects of his anxious solicitude, were already enjoying their heavenly reward, besought the Lord, with sighs and tears, to make him a partaker of their happiness, as he had been a sharer in their struggles. The crowd, disappointed in the expectation of witnessing a long and bloody trial, began to vociferate, demanding of the prefect that Victor should again be put upon the rack. Their wish was soon gratified: the glorious champion was not only stretched

upon the rack, but his body was mangled by the executioners, with clubs and heavy thongs made of bull's hide. The Martyr neither flinched nor complained. The torturers, at last, grew weary of their cruel task. Victor was again sent back to prison, where he spent three days in continued prayer, commending his Martyrdom to God, with mingled tears of joy and compunction.

When the Emperor heard, that all the torments inflicted by his officers proved ineffective against the constancy of the Martyr, he resolved to take himself the matter in hand. Victor was, therefore ordered, to appear before Maximian. When he stood in the imperial presence, Maximian said to him:

"Victor, I am told thou remainest obstinate in thy adherence to a false religion."

"As I have been dutiful in the service of my country, so I must needs be faithful to my God," said Victor.

"The God whom thou adorest, is not the God of the Empire."

"The God whom I adore is the God of all Empires, of all ages, of the universe."

"Is He indeed?"

"He is the only true, eternal God; beside Him there is no God."

"He is not the God of the divine Emperors of Rome," said Maximian.

"He is the great King above all gods," replied the Martyr; "the divine Emperors of Rome are poor mortal men, even as their subjects, in the sight of the true God."

On hearing this bold answer of the Christian hero, the attendants of the Emperor, and the people that stood around, set up a cry of indignation against him. Maximian, disguising his real sentiments under the appearance of an unruffled calmness of mind, ordered an altar to be placed near the Martyr. A priest of Jupiter, bearing the incense for the sacrifice, stood near the altar. Maximian said to Victor:

"Victor, I admire thy courage. Be wise. Go, take the incense, sacrifice to Jupiter, and be our friend."

"Never will I sacrifice to Jupiter, nor to any other demon," answered Victor.

At a sign given by the Emperor, the officers seize the Martyr, force the incense into his hand, drag him before the altar. Victor struggles with all his strength against overpowering numbers. The spectators gaze, with trembling anxiety: "conquered at last," they seem to say. The arm of Victor is already made to extend over

the altar, as if ready to drop the incense, when, with one vigorous thrust of his foot, he sends it rolling through the room.

"I am a Christian!" he exclaims; "the gods of the Gentiles are demons."

The Emperor turns pale with rage: "Cut off that foot!" he shouts.

The order is executed. The Martyr offers it to God as the first-fruits of that body which is soon to be wholly sacrificed—an acceptable offering in His sight. After this, Maximian commands, that Victor be taken to a mill, that there his body may be ground to powder. This horrible sentence is forthwith carried into effect. The Martyr is placed beneath the mill-stone, his body is crushed, but the machinery is put out of order. The Saint still breathes: to complete his victory, after so hard-fought a struggle, his head is struck off with a sword. At the same moment, a loud voice is heard from heaven: "Thou hast conquered, Victor, thou hast conquered." Such was the Martyrdom of this glorious soldier of Christ.

Maximian—who had been unable to subdue the noble spirit of these soldiers of the Cross, whilst they were alive—sought to wreak his vengeance on them when dead. By a last act of barbarous

cruelty, he forbade the bodies of the four Martyrs to be buried, ordering them to be cast into the sea. But God, who is glorified in His Saints, commanded the deep to give up these precious remains. The Christians collected them with pious care, and reverently placed them in a tomb hewn out in the solid rock—where numerous miracles proclaimed the merits and sanctity of the blessed Victor and his three companions.

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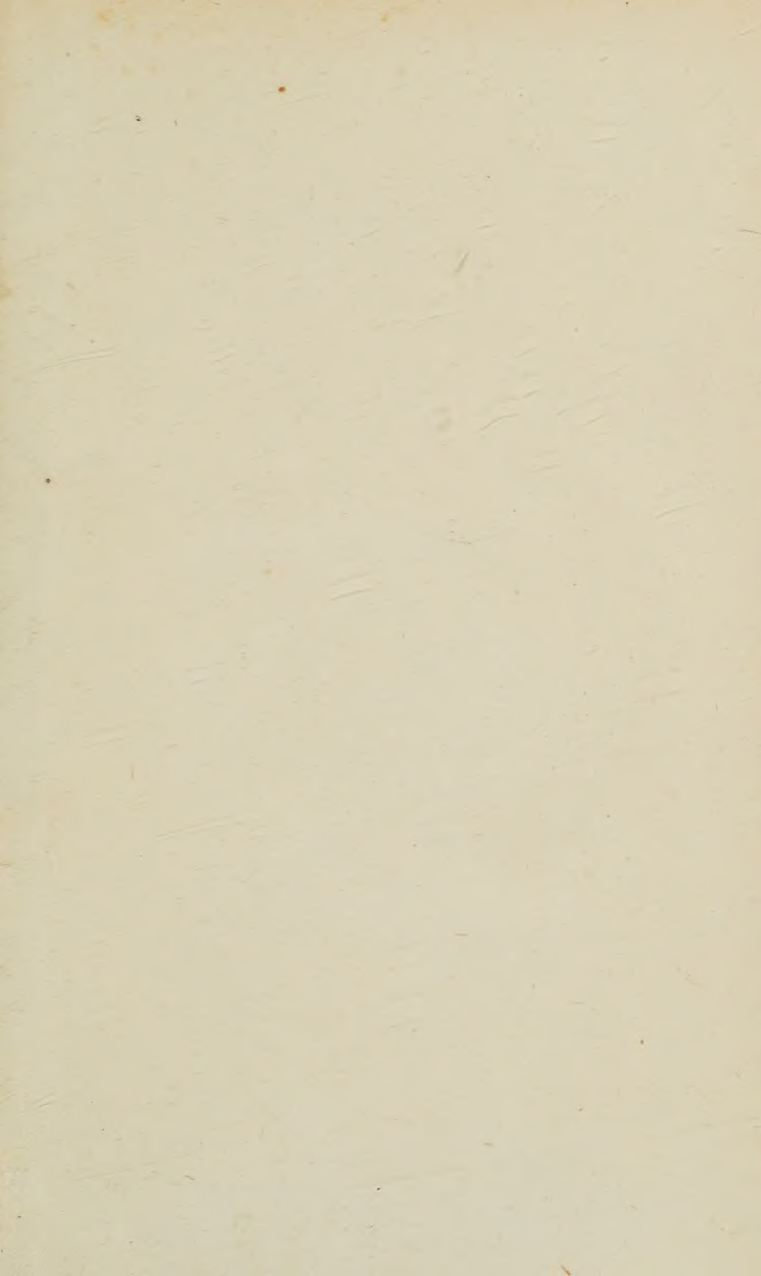




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